

# interzone

OCTOBER 2002

NUMBER 183

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**John Meaney**

**Chris Beckett**

**Mat Coward**

**Timons Esaias**

**Peter T. Garratt**

**plus**

**an interview with**

**Christopher Priest**



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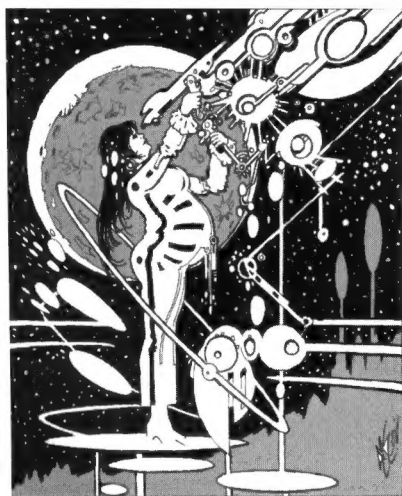
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## COMING NEXT MONTH

More new stories by a wide range of authors, including another piece by Zoran Živković. Plus all our usual non-fiction and reviews. So keep a lookout for the November issue.



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# interzone

science fiction & fantasy

OCTOBER 2002

Number 183

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**Cover by Dominic Harman**

Published monthly. All material is © *Interzone*, 2002, on behalf of the various contributors

**ISSN 0264-3596**

Printed by KP Litho Ltd, Brighton

**Trade distribution:** Diamond Magazine Distribution Ltd.,  
Unit 7, Rother Ironworks, Fishmarket Road, Rye,  
East Sussex TN31 7LR (tel. 01797 225229).

**Bookshop distribution:** Central Books,  
99 Wallis Rd., London E9 5LN (tel. 020 8986 4854).

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## "Interzone is Great"

Dear Editors:

Just wanted to send in a couple of thoughts about your magazine. I saw that you were nominated for a Hugo (congratulations!) as a semi-prozine. Anyway, I guess I don't know what a semi-prozine, is, because as near as I can tell *Interzone* is the most professional science-fiction literary magazine currently in print, and probably for a long time.

I subscribe to this magazine, *Asimov's*, *Analog*, and *F&SF*, but due to my limited reading time these days they tend to accumulate in carefully sorted stacks next to my bed. There is no stack for *Interzone* – I read those as soon as they arrive.

There is some type of edge or class to your mag that is subtly lacking in the other mags. *Asimov's* is very good too, but *Analog* has too great a share of poorly written work, and *F&SF* is just too damn depressing for my taste. Sorry, I meant "Gothic." That stack is the biggest (yes, I know they have some great stories too!).

Anyway, just letting you know that I will definitely be renewing my subscription after my first year with you, and will probably get a lifetime subscription next year (after I pay off my credit cards).

Couple a' quick nods: Richard Calder is at his best when not writing "Lord Soho" stories. Chris Beckett's "Dunner" stories are fun. I wouldn't mind an actual opinion coming out of Nick Lowe's "Mutant Popcorn" once in a while. I could do without most of the humorous stories, because for me your mag is very expensive and short, so I would like to see the *really* good stuff maximized... but maybe I just need to lighten up. I did enjoy "The Hugo Nominee" (*IZ* 180) but Terry Bisson's brand of humour is better than most.

More stories! Keep the large glossy format – I love it. Keep up the great work.

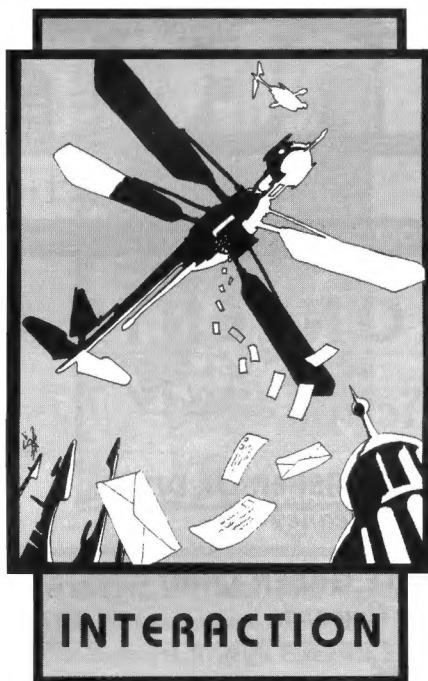
**Lee Latham**  
Houston, Texas

## Media Reviews

Dear Editors:

I notice that your media reviewer, Evil Lyn Lewis, does not like such TV series as *The X-Files*, *Babylon Tripe*, *Fartscape* and *Barfgate*. (Evil spelling used here – no relation to Aaron Spelling.) Given the excellent comments elsewhere in the column on *Buffy*, *Angel*, etc, I wonder if Evil Lyn could be persuaded to focus on series she has at least some time for.

**Peter T. Garratt**  
Brighton



## Gary Westfahl's Article

Dear Editors:

I much enjoyed Gary Westfahl's "The History of Heinlein's Future" in *IZ* 182.

Westfahl can be occasionally irritating and pretentious. (I still haven't ever quite forgiven him for stating in print in an article published in *IZ* that he wished more of his work would be rejected by *IZ* – surely a true mark of pretentiousness. And quoting those lines from Robert Frost...) Nevertheless his work is always interesting, to say the least.

And "The History of Heinlein's Future" is certainly that. I've never read the Heinlein article, I never knew of its existence, and now certainly won't seek it out.

But what Westfahl has done is to chronicle in detail a tiny bit of science-fiction history – a snapshot episode in the history of sf writing, editing, and publishing – the sort of material usually published by the likes of *Fantasy Commentator*. In fact for a moment I wondered which magazine I was actually holding – but no great problem as both are required reading in this household.

I always hope to come across Gary Westfahl's stuff in *IZ* – he generally takes the "revisionist" view, and shows that it can be a legitimate one, through his breadth of reading and his willingness to devote time and energy into drilling down into the depths of

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minutiae when he feels like it.

I hope that someone will publish a collection of his articles before much longer. I also look forward to reading the different versions of them written and published over a long period of time. "Where To?": Westfahl's Promises to Keep" is an article that will surely have to be published in *IZ* 500. (Who by? Ah... I shall not predict, I would probably be dead wrong.) But I hope I will be able to stick around for long enough!

**John Howard**  
[john@waldeneast.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:john@waldeneast.fsnet.co.uk)

## A Fine Issue

Dear Editors:

Good to see that you're still not averse to publishing the occasional piece of soft porn – Lalumiere's piece in issue 182 was genuinely part-warming.

Only *really* duff note was Westfahl, who can often be so entertaining and infuriating – unfortunately his latest piece was neither, which is a shame. But then I can't get excited about anything to do with Heinlein any more. This may be my minority misfortune, but then again, Westfahl did nothing to make the subject interesting.

Evelyn Lewes seems to be finding her voice, though – it's very difficult to write a column on a subject which, although you would love to like it, in fact you utterly hate. But then that's the beauty of Nick Lowe's film articles, single-handedly rescuing me from both-ering to waste my money on substandard sf fare – the occasional thing he likes that I also like, I am finding I've already seen before I read the article.

Keep publishing Zoran Živković – he's often the closest you get to poetry in your stalwart publication, and his are often the best pieces in a particular issue. I also support your decision to publish serials and extended connected series. But then I'm in for the long haul so I have the patience to wait them out if I don't like them. (Calder's recent one started brilliantly, by the way, but after four or five of them I found them unreadable; no matter, I'll try them again another time.) More stories like this month's (in which there was truly not a bum note) and perhaps shorter letters discussing wider subjects than the telly.

**Matt Westwood**  
[mattwestwood@ukonline.co.uk](mailto:mattwestwood@ukonline.co.uk)

## Evil Lyn Lewis replies:

Matt Westwood is right – I would love to like much of what appears on TV. But if I followed Peter Garratt's remit I would have precious little to write about. So, with regret, I will have to continue commenting on the bad stuff too. Sorry.



It's nice to find one's name dropped, even tongue-in-cheek... The recent Doctor Who novel *The Suns of Caresh* by "Paul Saint" contains this line: "He'd read the greats, the likes of Ursula Le Guin, Greg Egan, Gene Wolfe and David Langford, and he admired them" (p24). Who is Paul Saint, I wonder? Meanwhile, Peter F. Hamilton performs a similar service for Graham Joyce in his novel *Mis-spent Youth*, where Graham gets a walk-on part as "a man in his eighties" some decades hence: "Graham had won the last Booker Prize, back in 2012, when the publishing houses were collapsing in tandem with the copyright laws." Overseas readers may mistakenly assume that since the book features much irresponsible sex (though not with Graham Joyce), its setting is an allegorical, invented English county: Rutland.

## VISITATION ZONE

**Steve Baxter** has an important theological clarification: "I see from *SFX* (August) that in ITV's upcoming drama *The Second Coming* – 'Steve Baxter is the son of God' – I'm to be depicted as 'Jesus's 21st-century successor, born in the guise of a virginal Mancunian.' This is obviously inaccurate; I was born in Liverpool."

**Greg Feeley's** sf criticism has led various authors to revenge themselves by writing him more or less cruelly into their stories. James Blaylock, Lucius Shepard, the Niven/Pournelle team and Gene Wolfe are now joined by Grant Morrison, whose comic *The Filth* contains such tasteful dialogue as: "Greg Feeley's just a para-personality [...]. That's him running out of your nose." Later, from the same woman: "I'm washing Greg off my tits. Para-personas corrupt fast outside the bloodstream." Man: "Smells awful." Woman: "Well, that's 'Greg Feeley' all over." Oh dear, oh dear.

**Jo Fletcher** of Gollancz had a gruelling bone graft operation in July, to rebuild part of her neck and spine that had collapsed as a result of past car crashes. It seems to have been a success. Fingers crossed!

**Robert L. Forward**, sad to say, was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer and is unlikely to be with us for more than another year.

**Simon R. Green** seems strangely proud of baffling his American copyeditor with the common English phrase "Ripped to the tits on absinthe."

**Terry Pratchett** picked up a "mainstream" literary award at last: the Carnegie Medal for children's fiction,

## ANSIBLE LINK – 1



DAVID LANGFORD

awarded (in a special ceremony at the British Library on 12 July) to *The Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rodents* (2001). Terry confides: "I am, I have to say, somewhat pleased – not because *The Amazing Maurice* is fantasy, but because it is – ostensibly – funny." A later observation: "Reading all the papers after the event gives you a wondrous insight into the workings of journalism, I can tell you. *The Truth* really *was* a fantasy book – it contained a journalist who wrote down what people said and got it right..."

**J. K. Rowling**, in Czech translation, has the appropriate feminine suffix added to her name: thus Harry Potter titles spotted in Prague bookshops are, rather strikingly, by J. K. Rowlingova.

## INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

**As Others See Us.** "... the whole purpose of the novel is fiction; it's to imagine and to try and retain some credibility – unless you're writing sci-fi or something..." (Ann Widdecombe, BBC Radio 4, 8 July)

**Awards.** *Mythopoeic Awards.* Adult: *The Curse of Chalion* by Lois McMaster Bujold. Children's: *The Ropemaker* by Peter Dickinson. Scholarship, Inklings: *Tolkien's Legendarium: Essays on The History of Middle-earth* ed. Verlyn Flieger & Carl Hostetter. Scholarship, Other: *The Owl, the Raven & the Dove: The Religious Meaning of the Grimms' Magic Fairy Tales* by G. Ronald Murphy. • *British Fantasy Awards* novel nominees: *Always Forever* by Mark Chadbourne; *The Night of the Triffids* by Simon Clark; *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman; *Bold As Love* by Gwyneth Jones; *Smoking Poppy* by Graham Joyce.

**In Typo Veritas.** Hot new stuff for role-playing gamers, courtesy of someone's spelling checker: "Mongoose Publishing; Judge Dredd RPG: *Mega Cities Brit-Clit*. The first of the *Mega Cities* series for the Judge Dredd RPG, this 128 page d20 source book allows players to cross the Black Atlantic and explore the Land of Rain, Brit-Clit, introducing new rules for creating Brit-Clit characters..." (*Previews* comic news, August)

**R.I.P. Ian Hails**, Australian author of *Back Door Man* (1992), died from congenital heart trouble on 2 August; he was in his late 40s. • **Laurence M. Janifer** (1933-2002), US author who began publishing sf in 1953, died on 10 July. He was 69. His work included early collaborations with Randall Garrett (their joint pseudonym "Mark Phillips" achieved a 1960 novel Hugo nomination) and the ambitiously controversial *You Sane Men* (1965; reissued as *Bloodworld*), for which Janifer had high but unfulfilled hopes. • **Ward Kimball**, a pioneer of movie animation and one of Disney's fabled "Nine Old Men," died on 8 July aged 88. His countless animation and animation-director credits include *Snow White* and *the Seven Dwarfs*, *Pinocchio* and *Fantasia*. • **Leo McKern** (1920-2002), Australian-born actor fondly remembered as a standout Number Two in *The Prisoner*, died on 23 July aged 82. His genre film parts ranged from *X the Unknown* (1956) to *Ladyhawke* (1985), notably including *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961), *The Omen* (1976), and its sequel. • **Ron Walotsky** (1943-2002), US artist, died in Florida on the night of July 29/30, aged 59. He was a popular and respected figure, best known for his more than 50 covers for *The Magazine of Fantasy and SF*.

**Thog's Masterclass.** *Dept of True Romance, or Smoking In Bed.* "Tita timidly touched the hard muscles on Pedro's arms and chest; lower down, she felt a red-hot coal that throbbed through his clothes." (Laura Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, 1992) • *Dept of But What Do You Keep It In?* "There were chemical compounds that had some quite military properties, such as the ability to dissolve anything instantly including human flesh." (Lois McMaster Bujold, *The Vor Game*, 1990) • *Dept of Athletics.* "Her eyebrows leaped at him." (Megan Lindholm, *The Wizard of the Pigeons*, 1986) • *Purple Prose of Cairo Dept.* "Yes. Unable to press her tongue against the word, Briony could only nod, and felt as she did so a sulky thrill of self-annihilating compliance spreading across her skin, ballooning outwards from it, darkening the room in throbs." (Ian McEwan, *Atonement*, 2001)

# The Whisper of Discs

John Meaney

## Oxford, 2102

So this is the city: millennium-old spires encased in clear ice, enwrapped by winter's gloom. There, the Bodleian Library, its elegant domed Radcliffe Camera gleaming beneath a transparent shell; there, the Ashmolean's stately grandeur, white snow banked at the stone columns' feet. The streets form ice-chasms where occasional bug-cars slide through softly falling flakes, navigating the whiteout by radar.

*I should never have left. Or never returned.*

Augusta's vantage point is high: a curlicued smartglass tower, the ellipsoid hotel complex sitting at its apex. She is in the most expensive suite, with floor-to-ceiling convex windows. In the glass, her reflection, like a saddened ghost, overlays the ice-bound, moribund city.

Her long white hair is bound with platinum wire. Her shining pale-blue gown is high-collared – it keeps her warm – and falls in long straight elegant lines. Straight-backed, she stands, though her left hand holds a slender cane.

Unseen, within the formal garments, a slender exoskeleton provides the real support for her tired, narrow, pain-racked body.

*You've been here longer than I,* she tells the ice-locked



buildings silently. *But we're both near the end.*

She might have spoken aloud, save for the small silver sphere which floats above her right shoulder: her official biographer.

*I've outlived my enemies. But that's no excuse for relaxing vigilance.*

Instead, she snaps her fingers, places a call to her lawyers. Instantly – despite the fact that it is 4 a.m. in California – her chief legal officer comes on line. The head-and-shoulders image in the holovolume is system-generated (she can tell the difference), but then she has probably woken him up.

*Everything is different.*

Outside, dull winter presses against the window. Since global warming finally tipped the North Atlantic convection cell, English winters are an Arctic hell. And she has grown to hate the cold; she should have stayed in California.

"I've decided. I'm going into space." She speaks with utter finality. "I want to see, in person. To be there when the flight takes place."

"But –" The lawyer stops, then: "Yes, ma'am. I'll confirm the arrangements now. Oh, and Happy B –"

"Good. Augusta out."

*No one dares to call me Gus any more.*

But that is the least measure of her success – if it is success. For she has outlived her friends, as well as her enemies. With a lonely decade, maybe two, ahead of her... if she strictly follows her medics' conservative, over-protective regimen.

Her name is Augusta Medora de Lauron (the surname from her seventh husband, which she has kept because she likes it), her personal wealth exceeds anything she ever dreamed of, and today is her 113th birthday.

## Oxford, 1997

When she was eight years old, she told her mother that her real name was Gus.

"Augusta sounds silly," she announced with great solemnity. "And I'm not silly."

She waved a spoon as if for emphasis. Dessert was a banana mashed up with a little milk – some sugar sprinkled on top, for the extra calories – and it was a favourite.

"Does Augusta sound silly?"

Her mother – she still remembers this, 105 years later, with a brightness and clarity denied more recent events – turned and stared out of the small, grimy kitchen window. Outside, the darkness of a cold winter's evening. Mother's face was lined, though she could not have been more than 30, and she was very thin.

"You know" – she turned to face her child, sitting at the cracked formica-topped table (an unforgettable egg-yolk yellow) – "I do believe you're right, Gus."

Gus's face dimpled in a smile.

When she had finished her mashed banana, she slid from the chair, and went to fetch her duffel coat while Mother washed up dishes in the big cracked sink. By the time Mother was ready to leave, Gus was already standing by the front door (whose paint was flaking, revealing

silver-grey weathered wood: significant in retrospect, natural at the time), her duffel coat buttoned all the way up, her Buzz Lightyear satchel stuffed with books.

"You're a good girl, Gus."

"You're a good woman, Mum."

Mother bent down and they touched foreheads: their own private gesture which they had performed for as long as Gus could remember.

"Come along, pumpkin."

Gus sighed, but it was a kind of joke: she *liked* being called pumpkin, and she always had. Even though she was getting a little old for pet names.

Outside, the streets were cold. Gus walked with her hand in Mother's, hurrying a little as the bus-stop came into sight.

There they waited, beneath the sodium-vapour street-lamp, in front of an old council house whose patchy hedge, black beneath the glowing orange light, scarcely concealed the tiny front garden, the discarded bath and broken parts of rusty lawnmower strewn across it. Finally the bus came, only ten minutes late; its pneumatic door wheezed open and Gus and Mother climbed inside.

On her lap, Mother clutched the Safeway carrier bag she referred to as her "executive briefcase." Sometimes she would close her eyes, lightly dozing, though tonight she was not so tired.

Gus counted stops, keeping track of the route – "We're on the ring road now, Mummy" – as the bus circled the north of Oxford, and turned off into the small science park where Mother worked. They got off at the usual stop, and walked through the dark, empty car park (which in later years Gus would think of as a parking lot) to the locked entrance.

*Why is it always empty, Mum?* she had once asked. *Because the important people,* Mother replied, *have all gone home.*

Inside the lobby, it was her favourite security guard – Uncle Eric with the big grey moustache – who signed them in. Her second-favourite was Big Fredo, who talked to Mother in Italian, which Gus did not understand, though she loved to listen to the flowing lyrical words.

*Are we important?* she had asked her mother.

After a pause, *Oh, yes,* Mother had replied. *You, pumpkin, are the most important person of all. That's why they leave the office building empty, just for you.*

"Hey, Louisa," said Eric. "Good to know the real workers have arrived."

"I guess so. How's Esther?"

"Just the same." A slow shake of the head. "Just the same."

"See you later, then."

"I'll be here." Just as he always said: "Same old same old."

Mother hung up her threadbare anorak, took the freshly laundered light-blue work-coat from her carrier-bag, and pulled it on. From the cupboard, she dragged out the big old vacuum cleaner, set the mop and bucket aside for later.

"Come along, pumpkin. Let's get set up."

The wide, gleaming machine room was her domain. *Machine room*. Gus had learned the name from one of the late-night computer operators, who used to chat with her before the night-shift had been cancelled (*Because they finally automated the overnight run*, the woman said morosely. *Even the back-up routine*.)

The place was clean, always cool, with a crispness to the conditioned air which Gus could almost taste. Sometimes she stuck out her tongue – when there was no adult to see – and tried to lick the dust-free atmosphere itself.

The big desktop shone an eerie white beneath strong fluorescent light. All around stood row upon row of pale-grey and matte-black rectangular boxes: the Computers (the capital was obvious, whenever Mother talked about them) which kept the business going.

Gus had learned to program in Logo when she was six years old, on the cracked BBC Acorn at the back of her form-room in school, on a decades-old table bearing the scratched initials of long-forgotten pupils.

By this time, aged eight, she knew the difference between program and data, between processor and disc. Gus was aware that the boxes discreetly labelled System/38 (that was an old one, battered by now), AS/400 and RS/600 were processor units; the majority of the rest were disc drives. Row upon row of them, like tall refrigerators, stacked inside with spinning discs.

Once, one of the other cleaning ladies who worked with Mother had unplugged a disc drive – so she could plug in her vacuum cleaner – and the next night the cleaners' supervisor had arrived and taken her off to one side (*"For a quiet word,"* he claimed). The woman left in tears; neither Gus nor Mother saw her again.

Since then, the cleaners had been under strict instructions never, under any circumstances, to venture inside the machine room where the Computers (with a capital C) were kept. But no one had ever changed the lock-code – X and Y together, then 3-2-Z, before turning the dull steel knob in what felt like the wrong direction – so Mother had found the best place of all to keep Gus safe while she worked.

"Get out your books, pumpkin."

"Okay, Mum," she said as always. "I'll be good."

And then she was alone.

It was true that she read the books. And that they were a mixture of titles, from *War and Peace* to G. A. Dickinson's *Algebraic Secrets*, which were too advanced for an eight-year-old, though her mother only half-realized this.

But often Gus would slip down from the operator's swivel chair, leaving her open books before the consoles, and simply sit cross-legged on the floor-tiles, staring at the rows and rows of black and grey boxes. And listening.

For at night, discs whisper their secrets to those with ears to hear.

Susurrations. A breathing, a soft chaotic overlay of nearly-words, of almost-conversation, as if she eavesdropped upon a salon-full of ghosts from centuries gone by: with everything to gossip of, but no breath to speak.

Sometimes, they moaned.

But mostly the indeterminate sounds formed over-

lapping whispers from beyond, whose words would never coalesce into meaning, yet whose message would haunt Gus-who-grew-into-Augusta forever.

## Ashley Combe, 1843

Upon the wall, a gaslight hisses, incandescent. Ada lies back upon the chaise-longue, dabbing a dampened cloth on her too-pale forehead. On the dainty table beside her lies a small pile of notes scribbled in black ink, with loops and scrawls surrounding the strange equations, and scraps of verse – forbidden verse! – in her scratchy handwriting.

And, on one of those sheets, something new: an ink-drawn table with numbered, imperative steps of logic. Slow, for a person to work through those iterative commands: yet in her mind, burning with fever, it is Babbage's gleaming Engine which is alive with the pseudo-thoughts she has created; it is polished cogs and shining rods which click and spin more surely than too-weak mortal flesh, undermined by moral frailty or feminine weakness.

*The Pattern beneath the world...*

Is she mad? Can she, a mere woman, be the first to have deduced the true possibilities of Babbage's calculating engines? Can she, for all her disadvantages, her cursed beginnings, truly perceive the power of mechanical minds?

For she has written the devil's code, logical steps which will execute within the power-realm of brass and steel, in stately sequence as exact and elegant as an evening's programme at a debutante's ball.

*"But I am the Silver Lady..."* Her whispered voice trembles.

For the laudanum's magic is upon her.

In her vision, she herself is Babbage's automaton: the scandalous Silver Lady with which he entertains his rich and famous guests. That Silver Lady of which "Lady M" complained in an open public letter: an artificial woman whose garments were too diaphanous for polite society.

But in Ada's dreams, it is she who is semi-clothed, with Babbage's rough hands upon her.

*O, my father! It is your Dark Nature which calls to me...*

For all that her mother tried to whip the influence from Ada, Lord Byron's spirit is within her core, tempted by all that is lascivious and compelling.

Then a voice penetrates the heavy dream – "O, my beloved Beauty" – and for a moment she thinks it is William, her too-tame ingenuous husband. But no, he is away in London; it is her dear friend, John Crosse, who takes her hand and presses it to his lips.

"Sweet, my prince..."

His hands are within her garments.

But her mind's eye is filled with other sights: coils and bubbling vessels, the strange electromagnetic experiments of Crosse and Faraday, the very real mysteries they have explored. And this man, in whose arms she moans, is the son of Faust: for his father Andrew has *generated life* from electricity. Society is ablaze with the news. After leaving his electrolytic apparatus bubbling for three weeks, he has found tiny animalcules on one of



the electrodes. Life, from base inanimate matter.

And Faraday, her other hero in this scientific age, has Ada's portrait hanging prominently on his wall. Does she inspire him, even as his rough-hewn manner and sparkling intellect fire her imagination?

Inside, she burns.

Crosse moves upon her – "My darling, my Queen of Engines, Enchantress of Numbers" – repeating the title which Babbage gave her, and has now become their own.

She cries out with pleasure, not caring if the servants overhear.

"My good Doctor, creator of Life, bearer of Fire –"

A dark-blue glass bottle, lying on its side upon the rug, has become unstoppered. Precious drops of liquid escape, evaporate. Their heady vapour incenses the wild, drugged atmosphere which already pervades the drawing-room.

*The Pattern...*

Yet there is unease beneath her happy, chaotic delirium, as though Ada already senses the new life quickening inside her.

But she is captivated by logical symbols, drawn in fire within her mind, enraptured by the notion that she – Augusta Ada Byron, Countess of Lovelace, eternally cursed daughter of mad, bad, dangerous-to-know Lord Byron (whose incestuous liaison with his own sister Augusta, after whom Ada in all innocence was christened, is the scandal which drove him finally from England) – has been vouchsafed a vision both divine and mad, of gleaming polished power beyond the strict confining world, and she cries out as she pulls her scientific lover to her sinful bosom once more.

## Oxford, 1998

At the age of nine, Gus was still too young to travel to the library by herself – "Not in these godforsaken days," as Mrs Arrowsmith who lived next door would say – although, once they were there, Mother would let Gus roam among the bookshelves without supervision.

Sometimes, if Mother was very tired, they would walk from home out to the Park & Ride car park, where they could pretend they had left their car (the one they didn't own, that didn't exist) so that they could ride the bus for free. (Was there some kind of ticket Mother should have shown? Gus would wonder later, when she was older, whether there had been a particular, charitable driver.) Most times, though, they caught the normal bus or simply walked.

Once in the library, Mother would stay in the reading-room, among the reference books and periodicals, and sit drowsing in the warm surroundings.

One October night, she regarded the pale fog thickening outside the windows – it was 4 p.m. on a Saturday, and she was not working tonight: there was no place to go – and thought about home, of sun-drenched hills and the clamour of noisy, cheerful neighbours, and wondered again why she had ever come to this cold country.

In front of her, this week's *New Scientist* was open. She flicked through it, barely understanding what she read. Sometimes she tried to read *Nature*, a real scientific jour-

nal which the library dutifully stocked. None of it made sense, and yet if she half-drowsed, a strangely relaxing sensation of wonder settled over her like a blanket.

This night, she craned her head to catch sight of her daughter – there, lost in a world of her own, wandering among books. Gus would pick enough to fill the limit on both their library cards.

*If only I had more time–*

But the Catherine Cookson would do her, Louisa, for a few weeks. She barely had the energy to read a page or two, last thing at night, before turning out the light and sliding into sleep in her narrow, lonely bed.

Sometimes, Louisa glanced over the titles which Gus had picked. Once, she had tried to read a book by someone called George Eliot – knowing that the writer had been a woman, writing when only men could call professions their own – but the convoluted 19th-century English was difficult. There was a man in the story, who was talented and successful, but eventually strayed in society as he was overtaken by irrational desires for a Jewess, finally taking the socially disastrous step of converting to her religion. But, it turned out, the man's mother (though she had appeared "true English") had been a Jewish actress, and the burning desires were his blood's true nature coming out –

She had thrown the hideous book aside, disturbed for more reasons than she could name, and considered hiding the book where Gus could not read it. But then, Gus was sensible enough not to be swayed by the half-rationalized bigotry of another century.

There were Italian novels, and some Spanish ones – easy enough to read – but Louisa steered clear of them. They stirred thoughts of the home she had left 15 years ago, and could never return to.

She would stick to her Catherine Cooksons and her Danielle Steeles, written in English simple enough for her to understand, and forget the rest.

*I'm so tired–*

Then someone was shaking her shoulder.

"Time to go home," the young man said, kindly. "Your little girl's waiting."

And his concerned thoughts were obvious: *You should eat more, too.*

In the reading-room's doorway, Gus was standing with her arms full of books. She grinned at her mother, showing the gap in the front where two neighbouring milk teeth had dropped out within days of each other.

"Sorry." Rubbing her eyes, she smiled at Gus. "Got your books, pumpkin?"

"Yes, Mummy."

She took the books from Gus's arms and carried them to the counter, where the librarian could scan them through.

"Hmm. Abbott's *Flatland*." He stamped the due-date inside. "Not bad. But I don't know this Pickover chap. *Surfing through Hyperspace*. Is that good?"

He looked up at Louisa, but it was Gus who answered: "It's not bad. I like the stories."

Since it was a non-fiction book, the librarian chuckled, and winked at Louisa as though they were sharing a

joke. But there *were* stories inside, as well as strange science; Louisa had looked over Gus's shoulder the last time she had borrowed the book.

"Come on, pumpkin. Time to go home."

The young librarian watched them as they left.

Later, on the bus ride home, Gus tugged at Mother's sleeve and said: "Why don't you marry him?"

Mother's face froze. "I'm sorry?"

Gus knew the one topic she could never ask – would never get an answer on – was the subject of her father. But this was different.

"The man at the library. He likes you."

For a moment, Mother was speechless. Then she shook her head, smiling sadly. "Oh, no, Gus. I'm not good enough for him."

"But Mummy, you're–"

"No, I'm not." Silence, then: "But you... You're the most important person in the world, little pumpkin."

And Gus, with a child's intuition, kept silent for the rest of the journey. She was tempted to open one of her story books – there was an old one with a bright yellow cover, *Time is the Simplest Thing*, and she'd read the first two pages inside the library, with the pink telepathic alien blob, and saw immediately that it was brilliant – but she knew from experience that trying to read inside a moving bus would make her sick.

And the waiting, she knew, would make the story even better.

Over the next year, Mother would occasionally smile and nod to the nice man at the library, but they would never get into a real conversation. And then, one Saturday, there was no sign of him. Neither Gus nor Mother ever saw the man again.

Eleven years later, when she was 20, Gus would finally discover her birth certificate – born in 1989 in St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, London – with her mother's name written in the appropriate spot: Louisa Annebella Calzonni. And, in the space for the father's name, nothing.

Nothing at all.

And decades after that, when she had become one of the richest women in the world, she would hire private detectives, and even ask favours of official investigative agencies, including Interpol, to find out something of her origins.

One enterprising team would eventually find the grave of a couple named Calzonni, whose daughter Louisa had disappeared in 1987, in a small village on the outskirts of Turin. But in whose company Louisa had disappeared, or whom she had travelled to meet, no one would ever discover.

Of her earlier ancestors, Gus would learn nothing.

## London, 1844

Grey fog blankets the boulevard which is Pall Mall, causing the gas-lamps – the lamplighter is still on his rounds, can just be seen far down the street, at his work – to hiss in the damp, heavy air. The buildings are grand, doors fronted by columns in the neo-classical style: white-

painted or pale grey, eerie in the fogbound night.

There is a Peeler on duty, on the other side of the wide avenue, his tall rounded helmet lending him the appearance of a toy wooden soldier. But the long truncheon tucked in his leather belt, and the whistle for summoning help, are real enough.

The anonymous man, Ada's messenger, half-hidden in a doorway and overly conscious of the pistol in his tweed coat's pocket, stands very still.

*Mistress... This is for my Countess.*

Ada engenders such extreme reactions, in her servants as well as her peers: a total, smitten adoration; or a fearful loathing, as though her dark spiritual curse may be infectious.

*Just wait...*

And, eventually, there is the clop of hooves: a disreputable-looking horse and cart passing through, heading towards Trafalgar Square. The policeman leaves his post to investigate.

*Now.*

Ada's messenger, his face muffled against the fog and his hat pulled low, moves quickly but noiselessly across the cobblestones, and into the entrance-way of the Athenaeum Club. Ignoring the shining brass knocker, he taps softly. After a long, tense moment, the big panelled door swings open.

The footman nods in recognition, and leads the messenger inside. In the messenger's left hand is an envelope addressed to *F. Prandi, Esq.*; he holds it up for the footman to see. A discreet cough, then another manservant gestures, and leads the messenger along a marble-tiled corridor, to a quiet gentlemen's snug at the rear.

A knock, and the door is opened from within.

"Ah, my friend." A rotund man beams. His Italian accent, when he speaks, is scarcely detectable. "Come in. Sit down."

There is a reek of old cigarillos in the room, although no one is smoking at present. Books line the walls, and copies of *Bentley's Miscellany* litter two small tables. A globe stands in one corner, beside a heavy, dark-green ceiling-to-floor drape.

"I am reading the most excellent serial" – the round-faced Italian's smile flashes beneath his dark moustache – "by your wonderful Mr Dickens. Whom I gather" – lowering his voice – "your esteemed mistress personally knows."

The messenger's expression is stoic. His reply, when he makes it, carries the unmistakable burr of the Scottish Highlands.

"That I cannot say, sir."

"And what can you say?" Irritation prickles Signor Prandi's voice. "What, pray, is that in your hand?"

"A letter, sir. Addressed to you."

The messenger hands it over quickly, before the Italian can snatch it, or make disparaging comments about his mistress.

"Hmm..." Tearing open the seal, Prandi flicks a glance over it. "Not signed, I notice."

"She... Since the matter of the Royal Mail, sir..."

The Italian's private letters have been intercepted in the past: an absolute scandal to the British public who had



assumed their personal correspondence was sacrosanct. But then, Signor Prandi is a known spy, and a foreigner.

"Don't worry." Reading the note more carefully, he adds: "Do you know anything of this favour she wishes me to grant?"

A pause, then: "No, sir. I do not."

But that hesitation told its own story. There is a flash of gold, as Prandi hands over two sovereigns. The messenger gulps, then secretes the coins in his waistcoat's watch-pocket.

"I only... The bairn'll need a wet-nurse, sir, if it is to survive."

"A child? Ah, I see. Very good, my friend."

"Sir."

The messenger gives a stiff nod, then leaves the small snug, closing the door behind him.

After a decent interval, to make sure the messenger has left the club, Fortunato Prandi sits back in his overstuffed armchair, and uses the silver point of his cane to ruffle the green drape at the small room's rear.

"You can come out now, Aldo."

"Thank you." The drape is pulled aside, and a lean-faced man steps into the room. "This message... It's from the countess?"

"The very one." Prandi taps his teeth with the envelope's edge. "And I wonder what kind of trouble she's in now."

But they both heard the messenger's comment: there's a newborn child involved. The Countess of Lovelace has been touched by too many scandals in the past; one more would be disastrous.

"The countess knows" – Aldo Guillermi's face is tightly drawn: his long hair and wide shoulders bespeak an athlete's grace, but his body is fairly vibrating with tension – "of my sister's misfortune."

How else would anyone associate an Italian spy with a wet-nurse? For Guillermi's sister Maria, so young and beautiful, has but recently lost her firstborn to a raging fever no English doctor could identify, no apothecary could cure.

"We spoke," says Prandi, still in English, "in general terms, no more. The countess knows of your sister's plight, but not her identity."

"That is good."

For a moment, as the two men face each other, it is not certain where the power in this room really resides. Then Prandi's glance slides away. Though he is nominally senior in the republican movement, his forte is solo, diplomatic espionage: moving among the drawing-rooms of the rich and the good, gleaning gossip, recruiting admirers. It is Aldo Guillermi who is the soldier, used to bearing the responsibility of command.

"Mazzini," he says, "has mixed feelings about the current *furor*."

Guillermi pronounces the last word in the Italian way.

"The republican cause" – Prandi shakes his head – "can only benefit."

Both Mazzini, the true figurehead, and Prandi are in exile: the public face of agitation. Prandi's work as a spy has been both hindered and helped by his now-public

identity. Mazzini proved, to most intelligent readers' satisfaction, that the British Government caused their personal letters – his and Prandi's – to be opened, by the supposedly untouchable Royal Mail.

Hence this handwritten note from Ada, which reads:

*Dear Prandi. I have a more important service to ask of you, which only you can perform... and goes on to arrange a rendezvous, without specifying the new favour's nature. Ada identifies herself anonymously, thus: I am the person you went with to hear Jenny Lind sing. I expect you at 6–*

"Your mother," adds Prandi, as Guillermi finishes reading the unsigned note, "has raised more funds for the cause."

"It will be good to see her again."

Guillermi's mother is French, and France has been home to many for whom Italy is too hot a place to be in these troubled days. More than anything, Guillermi wants to remove his sister from this cold benighted country.

"Since Maria lost the child" – his gaze turns bleak – "I have feared for her sanity. And since her husband Higgs seems lost at sea..."

"She had best set sail for southern France, where your mother can take care of her."

"Yes." Guillermi's hand goes to his hip as though to rest upon a sword-hilt which is not there. "That would be best."

"And the Countess, it seems, needs a newborn child to disappear."

Guillermi looks at Prandi. The overweight spy looks unduly pleased with himself.

"How can you be so certain? There might be another explanation."

"Ah, my friend. It is not the first time" – with a flashing grin – "I have caused a member of her family to vanish."

## Oxford, 2001

Gus was twelve in the December when she took home that end-of-term report card: the last report before everything changed.

*A withdrawn child, the summary read, who needs to interact more with other children.* It was the kind of report which Louisa had come to expect.

But there were one or two puzzled hints from other teachers, including Mr Brownspell who taught physics: *Produces occasional flashes of surprising intuition, when she succeeds in engaging with the class at all.*

When the English teacher, Mrs Holwell, set an essay assignment on *Inevitability in Daniel Deronda*, a novel the class had just read – by chance, the same Eliot book which Gus had borrowed, and her mother had tried to finish, several years before – Gus's reply was a long and flowing indictment of genetic determinism: eloquent and reasoned enough for suspicions of plagiarism to spring up in every adult who read it.

Worse, the essay contained equations and conceptual diagrams – of interconnected springs – forming a mathematical model of the interdependence of genes, and their developmental motion through a phase-space of genetic possibilities. It replicated some of Kaufman's work (which

she could not have seen) from the Santa Fe Institute – *which is the nearest*, she said in the essay, *we get to pre-determined lives, and it's not close at all* – and demonstrated the existence of broad constraints on the otherwise random, unimpeded arms-race of co-evolving replicators.

"I got the idea," she told Mrs Holwell, "from the Faraday lectures. On the telly."

The English teacher, who had never heard of Richard Dawkins, was unimpressed. But she was sufficiently annoyed to show Gus's exercise book, during a break in the staff-room, to Mr Brownspell. And he was astute enough to be amazed by what he read.

"You watched Dawkins," he said to Gus later. "When you were how old?"

"I was young." The twelve-year-old, with a solemn expression, shook her head. "But I remembered it."

"Mm. I don't think –"

"He's *real*, you know. I saw him in town last week."

"Quite." Brownspell was bemused. "He works here, doesn't he? In the university."

It was the first time Gus realized that Oxford could be a special place.

Perhaps the fuss would have died down, kept Gus's life more normal, if this had not been an inspection week. But Alex Duggan was the inspector, and he was a young man who was overly sensitive to the annoyance he was causing to already overworked teachers. Across the country, politically motivated or well-intentioned curriculum changes (depending on who you talked to) meant that teachers were putting in long unpaid hours to prepare internal reports as well as lesson material; the feeling was of rampant bureaucracy gone mad.

And Duggan, who had not so long ago been an idealistic neophyte teacher himself, welcomed any excuse to get involved with an issue which did not revolve around paperwork or failed administration. A problem child, or one of exceptional promise – in this case of suspected plagiarism, it could be either – would form a welcome break from a routine he was beginning to hate.

He interviewed Gus in the art room, keeping her back "for a small chat" after the others had left for morning break.

Afterwards, with a strange delight in his eyes, he showed his – or rather Gus's – trophies in the staff-room: geometric models formed of plasticine and bright plastic cocktail sticks.

"A hypercube." Brownspell recognized one of the forms. "But what's this one?"

"She's read about tesseract. Then extended the notion, all by herself" – Duggan blinked – "to hypertetrahedra and hyperpentahedra."

"Well." Brownspell slowly smiled. "What are we going to do with her?"

"Hmm? Indeed." Duggan's answering smile grew wide. "Did you know Dawkins is giving a public lecture tomorrow night? In the Zoology Institute."

"Perhaps" – Brownspell glanced over at Jenny Mensch, who taught French – "a couple of us could take her there."

"What about Gus's parents? What do you know about them?"

"A single mother. Works two, maybe three cleaning jobs."

"Ah." Duggan thought about the child's indictment of genetic determinism. "How very interesting."

*E. O. Wilson showed powerful forces*, the twelve-year-old Gus had written, *moving every species. But we are human beings and our lives are more interesting than ants.*

"Gus's mother is devoted to her. You can tell just by the way she looks at her."

"That's very good."

"You think we ought to have a word with her?"

"Yes... Yes, I think we should."

## London, 1844

Ada, Countess of Lovelace, stares at the orange crackling fire, at the sheet of paper burning, becoming ash which leaps upwards, falls back. Outside the window, darkness has settled on fog-bound St James' Square.

"Madam?" A discreet cough. "Are you indisposed?"

"Not according to the good Doctor Locock," she answers.

"I will let our guests know," says William, "that you will be along shortly."

"Please do, sir."

Her husband William, Lord King, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Lovelace, nods politely.

*What have I done?*

She sees her husband's real concern, and wishes that she could have been true to him, not given to the dark, wild, reckless passions she has inherited from her genius father. During her entire childhood, her stern unforgiving mother, Annabella, kept Ada forcibly away from the tempestuous Byronic verses: drove her relentlessly down this other path, of cold logic and objective mathematics.

Except that equations *burn* inside Ada, as insanely bright as any visions the Deity (or Lucifer) heaped upon her mad, bad father, whose bones now lie safely interred in the family vault.

*O, my son. What have I done?*

But there is no room in society for the child she has delivered. The other three – legitimate, everyone assumes – are well loved. She cannot allow herself to believe that their father was any other than her husband, the well-meaning William. His house gives her freedom from her repressive mother: the liberty she has always longed for.

Last month she gave birth, without her husband's knowledge.

It is an illness which causes her wild weight fluctuations, and that malady has allowed her to hide the pregnancy. Inspired by a penny dreadful, a cheaply sensational novel in which a woman had not realized she was *en ceinte* until the baby put in his appearance, Ada has kept the secret.

Also, it is because of her insane cycles, of extreme weight gain followed by catastrophic loss, that William has chosen not to be intimate with her, his wife, for over a year. By the will of Providence, they have spent much of that time living in separate houses.



Now, one way or another, the child must disappear.

Ada has a wild scheme in her head for financing the child's life. A gambling syndicate, using the power of her logic and Mr Babbage's Difference Engine, seeded with money from William. She has always been able to persuade him: by her forcefulness, by his genuine love for her. And she will need William's written permission to gamble in society, since a woman owns little of her own and it is the husband, always, who owns debts incurred by his family, as surely as he holds title to the capital he has inherited, to the monies earned from his own hard labours.

"You'll join us shortly, madam?"

"Oh, yes, dearest William." She sips from her claret. "That I will."

Her doctor no longer prescribes laudanum. Ada's current medication is a strict regime of hot baths and small doses of claret, taken constantly throughout the day. It appears to be efficacious.

In the flames which curl and lick inside the fireplace, this is the vision she sees: two scurrying figures in the nightbound dockyards, with a small well-wrapped bundle in their arms. Sometimes the baby cries, sometimes it is silent; either way, misery surrounds it as surely as the cold damp fog settles on the city she is growing to hate.

## Oxford, 2004

Bright lights, white walls, and the gabble of cheerful, energetic voices.

Gus picked at her tub of Ben & Jerry's "One Sweet Whirled," intent more on the bright babble of ice-cream-bar conversation surrounding her than the dessert itself. The other students were so much older – 18, even 20 – that she had reverted to her quiet ways. Around the various colleges, three or four other undergraduates were very young; one of them, like Gus, was only 14.

The others had been featured in their local newspapers or even the national press; their parents seemed to be teachers or chairmen of small but successful software outfits. Perhaps parental pressure drove them to achieve. For Gus, at home, this was not a factor; she knew only that her mother loved her.

Here, on wall-boards, a cacophony of brightly coloured notices announced plays, books for sale, a demonstration against world debt (which, on closer examination, had already taken place), used PCs for sale. A small yellow sheet caught her eye: JDK, she thought it read, before realizing her mistake – in fact it was a demonstration of something called JKD. Hardly interesting.

It was five years since Gus had logged on to *www.java.sun.com* and downloaded the basic Java Development Kit (already an outmoded name, but serious coders mostly still called it the JDK, rather than SDK) onto her school's battered old PC. And taught herself real programming.

At her table, the talk had moved from sex to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason; to Professor Schama's thesis that women were the driving force behind cultural change in 19th-century England (even before they

achieved suffrage); to the post-acid house Latin revival in general and El Phase-Transition's lead singer, N. Rapt, in particular; and back to sex.

Gus stared around the packed ice-cream bar, feeling out of place.

"Excuse me," she said to no one in particular, and slipped away from her seat.

She passed the notice board, scanned the yellow sheet announcing a JKD demonstration – some kind of kung fu: nothing at all to do with programming; you had to laugh – and pressed her way through to the exit.

Outside, on Little Trendy Street, she turned left, tucked her hands into her pockets, and began to walk. (A towny or a tourist would have called the narrow road Little Clarendon Street, unaware of the separate, insiders' geographical nomenclature known only to students and faculty.) The street, by whichever name, was dark and touched by mist. Gus shivered.

"– some change, please?"

A small youth, scarcely bigger than Gus, was sitting on a blanket in a doorway, with a black retriever curled up on his lap.

"Sure." Gus had very little money – now, or any time – but perhaps that sharpened her senses in some way. She knew real, desperate poverty when she saw it.

She handed over some coins.

"Thanks, miss."

"No problem." She liked the American sound of that: like something from the movies. "Take it easy."

She walked on.

*Something...*

Usually, this close to the city centre, the streets were safe. But there was a rustle as she passed the bushes by Wellington Square, and she stopped. Her skin prickled –

Then a heavy hand grabbed her sleeve.

"Hey, chickie. Should we be out after dark?"

Stink of breath, close to her. Gus choked.

And another voice, slimy, behind her: "Gimme, now!"

*Help me!*

Fear paralysed Gus's throat, her mouth wide but silent, like a dying fish. Her mind would not process what was happening as big shapes manhandled her. Gus was utterly helpless.

*I don't want to...*

"Hey!" An echoing voice.

Sound of a dog, barking.

*"Bitch-girl."*

Impact on her face. Spurt of warm blood in mouth.

Then they were gone, vanished into the thickening fog, while she sat back, stunned, on cold paving-stones. Beside Gus, the young homeless man squatted, careful not to touch her.

"Are you all right?"

His dog growled at the departed muggers once more, then looked at Gus, stopped, swallowed wetly, then licked her face.

## London, 1844

St Catherine's Dock is dark. Two figures hurry across the

cobblestones: Aldo Guillermi, muffled against the cold, carrying a cane which he is careful not to tap against the ground, and his sister, Maria. The baby, wrapped in her shawl, is silent.

"Aldo, we will be late. If it sails, what of our baggage?"

"Hush. They won't throw it off."

"But..."

"It sails, and we sail on board."

But their voices carry, and dark figures step from the shadows behind a pile of netting and crates. There are three of them, big and burly, with short heavy jackets over their tunics, and heavy belaying-pins in their hands.

"Well, mates." The first one spits a long stream of something dark onto the dockyard stones. "We've found a new friend, looks like."

"No." Guillermi raises his empty left hand, placating. "Sirs, I cannot. We're about to sail."

"At's what I said, innit?"

Press-gang? Or worse?

"I'm sorry." Guillermi adjusts his grip on the walking-cane. "I don't understand. Could you repeat that, please?"

"You deaf, or what? I said—"

The cane whips down and up, in an instant: downwards, across the leader's right hand, then uses the rebound to arc backhand across the man's face. His belaying-pin clatters on the cobblestones.

"Maria, go..."

They are almost upon him, but Guillermi sidesteps, leading them away from his sister.

"Get 'im."

A fencing-lunge, and he stabs the cane's point into a second attacker's throat, followed with a savate side-kick into the lower ribs. The man doubles up, but his mate has already seized Guillermi's arms from behind, the grip unbreakable.

*Strike like lightning...*

Guillermi snaps his head backwards, feels the crunch of broken nose against the back of his skull. Stamps downwards, arcs his elbow back – impact – and spins away.

*...and roar like thunder.*

Charlemont's never-forgotten words, as he drove his students to fight, scream now in Guillermi's brain.

"Yaaah!"

His warrior-yell startles all three attackers. A circular *fouetté*, a whipping kick into a thigh muscle, and the first is down, leg paralysed. Guillermi spins to one side – half-heard: "I've got 'im" – then his heel takes another in the throat, quicker than thought, in a beautiful *revers*. Then an arcing series of *la canne* strikes drops the leader.

All three men are down.

A civilized man would stop now, but a soldier knows better. If his attackers have other weapons, this is the moment when they will use them. So Guillermi – as has been drilled into him – does not stop, but whirls and stamps onto ribs, onto heads, whips the cane downwards again and again, until the threat is gone.

He began training in *le savate* with spoiled young gentlemen, in a somewhat effete salon, during his Sorbonne days. But he moved on to study with the huge powerful

champion Charlemont, who regularly lifted small cannon barrels overhead, and whose instruction was practical and deadly. In later years, Guillermi practised in the sun-drenched south, in the dockyard style of rough Marseilles, where sporting rules have never applied.

One of his attackers is curled up on his side, hands around his damaged knees, mewling, with a long wicked knife beside him. Guillermi kicks the blade across damp cobbles, out of reach. Another man lies still, softly snoring as though asleep. The third...

Moves!

Guillermi leaps back, startled by a flash of light – *blade* – and then a crack of sound. And the man slumps once more upon the cold dockyard cobblestones.

"Maria! Are you all right?"

Like a marionette with severed strings, the corpse lies with twisted neck, a pool of dark liquid expanding beneath its lifeless head.

"Yes, my brother." Blue steel glints in her hand, beneath the baby's form. "Let's go."

Her voice is very calm, as she slips the dark, six-inch Derringer pistol out of sight. It is a muzzle-loaded 1807 Derringer Phila, blued steel inset in polished wood: a percussion cap pocket gun which requires a steady hand and careful aiming. Guillermi is impressed.

*Some good will come of this.*

It is a strange thought for a protective brother to have. Yet Maria's hysteria is suddenly gone, along with the dark depression of recent days: replaced by a quiet determination. And somehow her renewed spirit has kept the baby – the newborn boy she must protect – from crying.

"Yes. Three days," he tells her, "and we'll see Maman once more."

## Oxford, 2006

There was a lecture to commemorate some obscure academic event – the anniversary of someone else's lecture – and it began with a boring recitation of the history of computing. The lecturer's accent was transatlantic, and his name was Ives, but Gus knew nothing of his work.

"And, before Turing's life was tragically cut short in 1954, hounded by society to his death, though he almost certainly did more than any other single man to ensure Allied victory in World War II..."

Gus's skin prickled.

*Turing was here, in this place*, she realized. *He was real.*

Buried in Ives's tone, she thought, was a resentment towards the society which had caused the mathematician's suicide. Perhaps not everyone in the room detected it – most of her colleagues were waiting in good-natured boredom for the meat of the lecture to follow – but on some level several of them did.

Ives was a visiting research fellow, and Gus followed his talk with interest: a brave attempt to bridge the conflicting software paradigms of formal specification languages and evolutionary algorithms. Most of the people sitting near Gus were Z experts, used to formulating system definitions with rigorous symbolic logic: they frowned at the anti-reductionist notion of creating code which had



evolved, not been designed.

Gus was fascinated.

Afterwards, she found herself among a small group of faculty and students drinking tea in the hallway outside the lecture theatre. When someone suggested relocating to a common room, Ives put down his half-drunk tea, looking relieved, then made the counter-proposal of coffee in Starbucks.

"My treat," he said, which swayed the balance.

"*Authors and academics*," he would tell Gus at a later date. "*are easily swayed by the promise of free drink or food.*"

"*Pavlovian conditioning*," she would reply. "*And the desire to meet like minds: let's be fair.*"

The coffee house was teeming with energy. While the rest of the group went upstairs to stake out a claim on seats, Gus volunteered to help Ives carry the collection of cappuccinos, frappuccinos, tea – that last for old Crichton, of course – and lattes, which someone had pointed out was a bag of bevvies.

"I was hoping," said Ives, leaning on the delivery counter, "to have a conversation free of maths humour, for a change."

A "bag" was technically correct: a mathematical set where duplication was allowed but sequencing was irrelevant – both Jim and Maureen had ordered venti lattes, and it didn't matter which of the two drinks either person took.

"No chance of that round here." Gus was surprised at her own boldness. "If you want normality, head north."

"Or just outwards, yeah. Town and gown. I love this old place." Ives had chosen to wear a bright red tie, and he was now running his finger inside his shirt collar, and looking uncomfortable. "Less formal than I expected. I was doing some consultancy at a place in London, and everyone was wearing business suits."

"You might as well take the tie off," said Gus. "Visiting the empire's last bastion must have misled you."

"Right. Here, it's just like home. I'm the only guy in this city who's wearing one." He tugged it, pulling the knot too tight, in his effort to undo it. "Damn. You know, I had to consciously work out the theory behind this, but I only modelled the putting-it-on operation."

So much for an evening without maths humour.

"Let me." Surprised again at her own actions, she reached up – aware of his close warmth – and undid the knot.

"Thanks. You realize there are more than 80 ways to tie one of these things?"

"Really?" Gus frowned in concentration, social niceties forgotten. It had become a technical problem, and that was interesting.

"A handy way to model knot topology," Ives said, stuffing the discarded tie in his jacket pocket, "is to consider the knot's context, the space around it."

"Oh, yes. Model the not-knots. I've heard of that..."

When the drinks arrived, they carried everything upstairs, and found their colleagues gathered on wooden chairs and armchairs around a small table, discussing

the constraints placed by Goedel's Theorem on some branch of research which Gus had never heard of.

*Do I really belong here?*

It was a question she asked herself often. But then some maths or physics or computation problem – they were all the same to her – would crop up, and she would be lost in the joy of solving it.

*I should get home, now.*

"– your opinion?" Ives was asking her.

"Sorry. I was thinking of something else." Gus put down the empty cup she realized she was holding. "I ought to be going."

Ives looked at her for a moment. Just then, they were in an isolated bubble of silence while animated conversation sparkled all around them.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

*How did you know?* She was so used to hiding the details of her life.

"My mother... She's not well." Gus blinked. She had not told anyone. "They've examined her at the Radcliffe Infirmary, and they don't know what's wrong. Or they're not telling us."

"Oh." Ives put down his own drink. "Where's home?"

Gus told him.

"You've got a car?"

"No. We—" Gus shook her head. "We can't afford one. And I can't drive."

"Ah, right." Ives stood up and turned to the rest of the group. "I'll be back shortly. Just going to run Gus home, is that all right?"

She had not realized he even knew her name.

"I'm parked in St Giles," he added. "Major achievement."

He left with Gus, whether it was all right with the others or not.

In the car, as they were travelling, he told her about Seattle: "You'd love it. Friendly city, great campus." He'd delivered various anecdotes about consultancy work for a software giant, during the course of the lecture and later. "Starbucks in the same building. When I was in the Games Division, the company took us to the movies, whenever a sci-fi or a fantasy came out."

"Cool," said Gus. And then: "You worked for the Games Division?"

"Yeah, for a while. I devised scenarios for *Tokugawa*. Devious politics and ninja fighting. What a hoot."

"Really."

"Hmm." Gus flicked a glance at her, then returned his attention to the road. "You don't like the game?"

"It's great, actually." With a shrug. "The martial arts were a bit exaggerated, but that's par for the course, isn't it?"

"You know about martial arts?"

Gus's voice was quietly confident: "I train in jeet kune do."

*Big hand, grabbing in the darkness...*

No one would ever mug her again.

In the course of a very long life, Gus would have only one occasion to use her art on the street – or rather, on a

lonely El station platform in Chicago, late at night on the Green Line south of the Loop, where a big thug attempted to beat an old man senseless with his own walking-stick, while his laughing buddies looked on – but the difference it made that night was mortal.

She used a reverse-snake escrima disarm to send the stick flying to one side, before clawing the attacker's eyes and breaking both his knees. The man's six buddies, through alcohol-clouded senses, noticed that she was small and female, and did not process the ease with which she had taken the big man out.

The rest happened very fast.

In seconds she was spinning and circling, throwing kicks and elbow-strikes, firing everything she had been taught in a continuous blur of adrenalized motion. The last man was even bigger than the first, drawing a knife from his belt but too late, as Gus used the running side-kick which Bruce Lee had developed to blast her attacker right off the edge of the platform and onto the tracks, where he narrowly escaped fatal electrocution.

Beyond that one incident, the daily discipline of physical JKD training, and her later experimentation with neurolinguistic programming, were the keys – she always thought – to her longevity and success.

As for her mathematical intuition... she would never be certain whether such discipline helped or hindered in that regard. But when applied to emotional control and financial management, it would certainly make her rich.

Very rich indeed.

That night in Oxford, though, as Ives was leaving her house – having stayed to chat with Gus and her mother, and being polite enough to pretend he enjoyed the dark strong tea which Mother made – Gus reached up to kiss him on the cheek, but he moved back subtly and she subsided.

"I am single," he told her. "But, you know... Most guys, at my age, are either married or gay."

It took a while for that to sink in.

"Oh."

Ives smiled. "Just so long as you know."

He shook her hand then, while her cheeks flared red. Over the decades, it was only the first of many shared incidents they would have cause to chuckle over.

And that was the first night she dreamed of knots.

## Provence, 1848

Medora stands at the window, looking out at the unseasonal rain falling upon the courtyard, thinking of England, which she will never see again.

"It's a time of revolution," one of the other two women says. "According to Aldo, this is the year the world will change."

Medora, painfully thin but strong now, turns slowly around. The woman who spoke, Alicia, is heavily pregnant. Seated by the pale stone fireplace, she rests one limp hand on the hemispherical bulge of her stomach.

*I should no longer regard you,* Medora thinks, *as my servant.*

She looks up at Aldo's sister, Maria, and they share

wan smiles. They grew fond of Alicia, when she came up from the village to help out, right from the very first days. Doing more work than she was supposed to. Chatting with Aldo about politics and history. Medora and Maria saw, long before Alicia and Aldo realized it themselves, that the young couple had fallen deeply in love.

*All three of us are sisters now.*

There is the family you are born into – in Medora's case, a dark calamitous beginning: the Byrons are truly cursed – and the family which, if you are a survivor, you get to choose. It has taken Medora a long time to realize this, but she knows it is true.

"He'll come back safely," she tells Alicia. "Don't worry."

Alicia nods, but Maria turns away. Since Aldo rode off to fight, she has been subject to moods of deep introspection.

*God will give me strength.* Medora puts her hand against her chest, pressing the hidden crucifix against her skin. *Even if I am damned, let me help these in need.*

In the past, she was always so weak and useless, going to her hated aunt – and to the woman who is both her cousin and her half-sister, Ada, Countess of Lovelace – for handouts, in desperation. But now, in the modest vineyard, she no longer exists in the eyes of English (or European) high society. The sins of her parents are no longer public gossip: they are between her and God.

For Medora's mother was Augusta Byron – the woman after whom Augusta Ada Byron, now the Countess of Lovelace, was named – and everyone knows, though no one says, that Augusta's own brother, the famous, devil-driven poet, was the unacknowledged father of her bastard girl-child.

It was Ada who arranged for Medora's relocation to this remote place. And now, since she sent this new child to be raised forever in secret, there has been no contact at all with England.

*I pray to God that it remains so.*

Here in southern France, Medora is known as the Widow Calzonni. Four-year-old Jean-Pierre, asleep upstairs, is supposed to be the son she bore to a dead fictitious husband; Maria was his wet-nurse.

Will they ever tell Jean-Pierre of his true parents? That his mother was Ada, the Countess of Lovelace, while his father was Dr Crosse, son of the man said to have created life from base matter?

It is a decision Medora has not yet made.

"I dreamed of Aldo." Alicia places both hands on her swollen womb. "He was bouncing our daughter on his knee, and she was laughing."

"A sign from Providence." Maria crosses herself.

But, in the event, it will be two years before they see Aldo again, although his child will indeed be a daughter.

He will appear in the courtyard, riding bare-back upon a weary half-starved horse. With his right leg shattered, he will be a changed man at first: bitter, given to drunken rages. But later, bolstered by the sight of his daughter's beauty, his natural optimism will reassert itself.

By the time of his death, his little empire of olive



groves and vineyards will be prosperous indeed. Those riches will remain until the eve of World War II, when disagreements with the local *fascisti* will cause everything to be lost.

But now, from the village church, the Angelus bell rings out.

"Time, my sisters" – Medora hands out well-worn missals – "to pray."

## Santa Monica, 2024

Arm in arm, Gus and Ives strolled slowly along the boardwalk. Late afternoon, with the surf rolling in below, pale seagulls gliding overhead. Salt tang upon the air; the fresh sea breeze washing over their tanned faces.

"You know" – Gus stopped, let go of Ives, leaned over the balustrade, and pointed downwards – "I lost my virginity right about there."

"Never." Shaking with gentle laughter, Ives looked over. "After dark, I hope."

"Oh, yeah. With a nice post-doc, since you wouldn't oblige."

"Right. I can still see the damp spot."

"Ho, ho."

They were celebrating, in a fashion: a deliberate way of experiencing today's events as a positive step forwards. For Ives had come home last night to an empty apartment. Not even a note from his departed lover, Raoul: just empty closets and missing cash. And invective scrawled in toothpaste across the bathroom mirror.

And Gus had just finalized her divorce – her *first* divorce, as Ives ironically (and presciently) labelled it – and seen her ex-husband drive away with his new girlfriend: large-bosomed, wearing a gaudy, shocking pink short dress, and a triumphant smirk upon her face.

*That'll disappear*, Gus reckoned, *when she finds out who owns everything*.

For the beach house and Sundriver-coupé skimmer were all hers.

"We've come a long way," she said. "Hey, that sounds dramatic, doesn't it?"

"Both of us." Ives touched his new moustache: it had come out tinged with grey, and he was not sure whether he would keep it. "I'm glad I met you, sweetheart."

"Likewise, dearest. Shall we walk to the end?"

"Why not?" As they walked on, he began to whistle softly – the Pattern theme, from *Amber: The Musical* – in counterpoint to the rolling surf.

"Listen." Gus squeezed his arm. "Are you doing anything tonight?"

A middle-aged couple in matching Hawaiian shirts and baggy shorts were staring at her and Ives, close enough to hear. She should have known the kind of answer she would get.

"Wearing you out, all night long. There's a position I've been meaning to—"

But the couple walked on then, offended, and there was no point in completing the sentence.

"Oops." Ives raised his eyebrows. "Was it something I said?"

"Ha. Is it just me, or are people more repressed than when I was younger? Even here?"

"Probably." Ives looked gloomy for a moment, then cheered up, and gestured at the wide ocean. "Look at that. Are we lucky to be alive, or what?"

"Yes, lucky." She squeezed his arm again. "Thanks for being alive, my friend."

She was nearly 25, and single once more.

*Saved from a big mistake.*

"We're good for each other."

"Oh, yes."

Their minds were both similar and complementary. When Gus developed the concepts behind *Fractal of the Beast*, it was Ives who helped brainstorm the network of developing relationships among the characters. She devised the aliens' forms, he worked out the structure of the shadow organization which fought them.

She coded the game; he negotiated the license rights.

From that first product, Ives insisted that he make no money directly. He already had his earnings from lucrative consultancy; she had nothing. "*But I'll be rich*," he said, as they signed a deal giving him 20 percent of earnings from any future games they might develop together. "*And so will you.*"

For the first six months, download figures were minimal. Then, in a fit of nostalgia or desperation, one of the big webnets started promoting a remake of the old *X-Files* shows, and the whole half-forgotten alien-invasion meme had come alive once more, and sales had rocketed.

Those fictional invaders would prove more important than anyone realized.

The alien hunt in the game proceeded through many levels. The stories were labyrinthine; a dark and gloomy sense of being watched was present in almost every scene; and there was action, with tricky clues to decipher. Only three players, since the game's release over four years before, ever reached the final level. (Unless there was someone else, with an offline copy of the game, who never hooked in with the rest of the world.)

But three users' systems had automatically mailed her when they deciphered the final puzzle. She sent each of them a rather substantial amount of money, though the game did not advertise the existence of such a prize.

One of the three was Arvin Rubens, a protégé of Danny Hills – and Arvin himself, when still a teenager, had met Hills's legendary friend, Richard Feynman – and he transferred the money back to her, with a note saying that he had no need for it.

"*Td only get myself into trouble*," he said, in an updated Feynmanism, "*by spending it on wine, women and a new holoterminal.*"

He also invited both her and Ives to come and work with him in Caltech.

Sunshine, sea. She could train in JKD at the Inosanto Academy. Why would she want to stay in old, cold Oxford?

"*Even if you don't come*," Rubens had told her, "*you've already helped my research.*"

For the game's final solution involved working out the

aliens' true nature. They appeared in many shapes and guises, but the key lay in realizing that each was a different projection of one fractal shape – a single being of dimension 6.66 – into ordinary spacetime. Just as, in the Pickover book which Gus had read in childhood, five disconnected blobs appearing on the surface of a Flatland balloon might really be fingerprints from a single, otherworldly hand.

And the underlying equation was useful because it came directly out of Gus's own research at Oxford, into the fundamental nature of the spacetime continuum.

"Come back to my place," she said to Ives, as they turned back from the end of the boardwalk. "I've got something to show you."

"Whoopee." Then, "House or lab, do you mean?"

"I mean the lab, darling. Sorry to disappoint."

As they passed a row of bright pastel houses, a drunk came shambling up to them, hand outstretched. *If you give me money, the display on his write-capable t-shirt read, I'll spend it on booze. But at least I'm honest.*

"Here you are."

Blinking in the sunshine, the drunk stood looking at the money in his hand – from both of them – as Gus and Ives walked on.

"If we asked him to tell us how he ended up here," said Ives, "I wonder what he'd say."

"Let's not go there." Gus used her watch to summon a cab.

"All right."

They waited silently until a vehicle slid to the curb, and its gull-door rose up. Gus slid inside first, announcing their destination loudly to the cab's AI, knowing that her vestigial accent could cause recognition problems.

Ives crossed his arms, as the door descended and the street began to slide past.

"People always draw family trees," Gus said suddenly, as though she herself had not told him to drop the topic of past lives, "upside down. Or hadn't you noticed?"

"Qué?" Ives spread his hands. *"No comprendo. Sorry."*

"Branching out downwards, with increasing time. But the further back you go, the *more* ancestors you have."

"Right. Ten generations back –"

"You have 1,024 ancestors."

"Assuming no incest. Yee-hah. You know you're a red-neck when—" Ives stopped, looked at her, then patted her hand. "Gus, dear. It wasn't your fault. It wasn't anybody's. Life just turns out like that."

"I know."

But Gus's sudden wealth had come too late to keep her mother alive. *Genetic defect in the heart*, the consultant had told her. *The neuro-degeneration weakened her, and we still don't know the cause of that.*

Silent tears, unbidden, tracked down Gus's cheeks.

A holo landscape half-filled the room, hanging above the desktop and extending outwards, so that Ives appeared to be standing in the middle of a mountain range.

"I've modified here, and here." Gus pointed at additional free-floating holovolumes in which equations

scrolled. "But it's little different from the standard mosaic."

The landscape represented a simplified three-dimensional spacetime – two spatial, one time – as an overall brane, formed of interwoven sub-branes. Gus pointed at the "zoom" icon. The image expanded until gaps were visible: the holes between linked Planck-length tessellae which form the vacuum itself.

"I reworked the topology" – Gus smiled – "using not-knots. Remember them?"

"Ah, yes."

The image flipped into a kind of mirror-converse. What had seemed a landscape was now a moirée pattern draped across something else: an underlying jagged sub-landscape which supported reality.

"Then I got more interested in the continuum's context than in spacetime itself. Modelling the not-knot—"

Ives nodded. "The power of metaphor. Well done, dear."

Faraday used the notion of fields purely as a metaphor, explaining electromagnetic action at a distance. Yet modern researchers thought of fields as the underlying reality, while everything else – particles, twistors, branes, tessellae – was illusion. Physicists gained the concept *"with their mother's milk,"* as Einstein said.

But Gus's work changed the metaphor. In her model, the eleven dimensions of realspace were the illusory projection, draped across the underlying fractal context which shapes both this and other universes. She had a name for the context: mu-space.

"The ultimate continuum," she said.

"If you're right, there's a Nobel prize in—"

"And I've already sent a signal through it."

## Ashley Combe, 1852

Hot flames crackle in the fireplace. A vision of eternal Hell awaiting her? Pain insinuates its claws between the deadening layers of laudanum intoxication: it is the crab, this disease which is killing her.

"My father –" Ada's voice is a whimper. "I want to be buried – with him."

"Hush, my dear." A hand pats hers. "That will be taken care of."

For a moment, she does not know who this is: William, perhaps Andrew Crosse, or Faraday... Last week, she believes, her old friend Dickens read to her. To *her*. Daughter of the great poet, but a strange, maddened fool in her own right.

*I've done so much wrong.*

Has Charles Babbage been to see his failing Queen of Engines, his dying Enchantress of Numbers? But it is John Crosse, her former lover, who is with her now. For a time, her old friends were barred from visiting; now it is too late for foolishness.

*It hurts—*

Her body is soaked. William and her sons – her three acknowledged sons – have been pouring cold water upon her bared, so-thin midriff to ease the pain. But for now, only Crosse is here with her.

"I received a letter," he whispers. "About... Jean-Pierre.



*Our son thrives. He thrives, my love."*

*My son?*

"He has a constant playmate," Crosse adds. "Daughter of the man who took him abroad. Giuliani? Something like that. Someday, says Medora, they'll be—"

The whimpering begins again.

*My son!*

Ada fights the pain, but neither guile nor ferocity will beat this last, implacable foe. Finally, though it takes two more pain-racked days, metastasized cervical cancer shuts down her internal organs one by one, her ragged breath rattles, and she lies still.

In the fireplace, lowering flames sputter. Grey ash spills upon the floor.

It was perhaps a mesmeric demonstration, at a soirée held on her 26th birthday, which opened the Pandora's box of Ada's mind, released the dark spirit which could never be contained again. She blamed that experiment – undertaken for sensation's sake – and her own impetuous nature for all that followed. Equations burned, pure thoughts soared, but her inner drives would always deny her peace.

Years earlier, her father's body, with massive pageantry, was conveyed by carriage, drawn by six black steeds, through London's streets (which were thronged with onlookers), and laid to rest in the family vault. Ada's own funeral is more modest; her narrow corpse travels by modern train, black smoke billowing in lieu of stallion's manes.

Finally, she lies interred beside the father she was not allowed to know.

Crosse, meanwhile, crouches beneath his mantelpiece, burning, one by one, every letter he received from the woman he loved, and every note from the forgotten half-sister entrusted with raising their secret child: the son he will never see.

## Santa Monica, 2024

That night, her demonstration seemed nothing special. Gus shone red laser light into her kludged lab-bench setup – draining power from the campus mesoreactor: she would get complaints – where the beam simply disappeared.

But, at the far end of the half-lit lab, a red spot glowed in mid-air.

To an onlooker, it would have seemed the simplest of holograms. Ives whistled as he examined the apparatus; whatever the underlying mechanism, the results were spectacular. Red light shone into nothingness, reappeared some seven yards away. He realized, though it would take decades for other minds to catch up all the way with his intuition, that this simple demonstration transformed everything.

Shortly before dawn, they were back at the beach, sitting upon damp sand, breathing in the ocean air. Stars still glittered overhead, though dark-green painted the horizon behind them.

"We're going to get there." Ives, craning back, stared straight up. "Thanks to you."

"I hope so."

They stayed there until the rising sun draped orange

fire across steel-grey waves, lighting the warm salt fluid which gave birth to life, splashing endlessly against the shore.

## High Earth Orbit, 2102

Sapphire, wreathed in soft cotton. The entire world lies beneath her: a jewel upon black velvet.

*So wonderful.*

Over her right shoulder floats the tiny biographer-globe, recording everything except what's important: her thoughts and feelings. The orbital station's view-bubble is reserved just for her.

*If I'd listened to what everyone knew was "right," I wouldn't be here.*

Gus has overridden both lawyers' and medics' wishes many times. ("There's no such thing as escape velocity," she told them weeks before. "Not with continuous thrust. I'll use a slow-shuttle. Perfectly safe.") The occasional lie will not hurt them: she came up fast.

They don't have her perspective on the world.

*After all this time.*

Seventy-eight too-short years have passed since her discovery. Lightspeed spinglobes, forming stasis fields within, were created 120 years after Einstein's blistering insights into the relativistic nature of spacetime. Her own research (she does not consider herself in Einstein's league) has taken this long to come to technological fruition.

*"Two minutes, ma'am."* A respectful voice in her earpiece.

Wealth comes from her corporations, more than intellectual endeavours. One of her companies owns the patent for this bubble's material: a transparent paramagnetic ceramic. She has always invested ten percent of income, given ten percent away (to children's foundations, mainly) and wisely spent the rest.

*But none of it had meaning...*

Her own researchers, at her insistence, use her as a guinea pig, for telomere replenishment and femtocyctic re-engineering: for every life-extending treatment which looks likely to work. Equally importantly, she practices Yang-style t'ai chi every morning. Gus refuses to die too soon.

*...until this moment.*

Dark space outside. She wishes Ives were here.

*"One minute."*

She remembers Mother, so frail in the hospital bed, in the Radcliffe's terminal ward.

*"Why did you call me Augusta, Mum?"*

A long pause, then the tiniest of shrugs, from shoulders so emaciated her bones looked razor-sharp, attempting to cut through skin.

*"Family tradition, pumpkin—"*

It was days before Mother found final peace in death. But those were the last coherent words she spoke.

Now, Gus watches the stars. Blackness, sprinkled with diamond stars, across an invisible context whose mathematical reality she knows, but whose tangible qualities neither she nor anyone else can see.

*Stardust, every one of us...*

Born in the nearest sun. But all those suns seem to murmur now, as long-forgotten technology once whispered to the girl she was: secrets she will never truly grasp.

"Ma'am..."

"I see it."

Silver dart. A tiny speck, orbiting fast, high above blueness, heading into...

Gone.

One moment it was there; next, the vessel no longer existed.

"Insertion complete."

Hopeful, that message from Observation Control. There was no explosion; with luck, it means—

Speck.

"Is that it?"

"Beg your—? Yes! Ma'am, they're back."

Shining light, growing.

The silver vessel gleams, broadcasting its report of success on all wavelengths.

"We saw it!" The captain's voice. "Alpha Centauri, for sure. Spectrometer confirms. We were there!"

"Thank you," Gus whispers.

The silver biographer-globe drops closer, and she frowns. Then she realizes she is lying down, though she cannot recall changing position.

Blackness, circling all around.

And the stars, so bright.

"...ma'am?"

Sounds, fading.

We made it, Mum.

And, for a moment, she sees it: the fractal Pattern, the mu-space reality which holds up our illusory cosmos —

Thank you.

Somewhere, a major blood vessel erupts. A crack, then relief.

Stars...

A smile spreads across Gus's lined face.

...fading...

Her personal universe dwindles.

...to darkness.

Is gone.

John Meaney has a new novel, *Context*, due in November 2002. His previous books were *To Hold Infinity* (1998) and *Paradox* (2000), and he was the subject of a memorable interview (by Molly Brown) which appeared in *Interzone* 158. His previous stories in the magazine include "Sharp Tang" (issue 82), "Parallax Transform" (issue 89), "A Bitter Shade of Blindsight" (issue 110) and "The Dreamlode" (issue 158). He lives in Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

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Born in 1943, Christopher Priest is reckoned amongst the finest authors yet to emerge from British sf. His early novels, *Indoctrinaire* (1970) and *Fugue for a Darkening Island* (1972), along with his first collection, *Real-Time World* (1974), were bleakly experimental, and competent enough in those terms; but his eminence was truly confirmed with the appearance of *Inverted World* (1974), an astonishing vision of cultural isolation and altered physics, and *The Space Machine* (1976), a complex tribute to H. G. Wells and one of the first significant steampunk novels. Thereafter, remaining faithful to the ambitious formal and thematic agendas that underpinned the sf of the New Wave period, Priest produced work that was less and less recognizable as genre fiction. *A Dream of Wessex* (1977) specifically portrayed sf's imagined futures as artefacts of solipsism; the Dream Archipelago tales in *An Infinite Summer* (1979), later revised and consolidated in *The Dream Archipelago* (1999), with still greater resonance classified the secondary worlds of fantastic literature as oneirisms, glimpses into inner space. By the time *The Affirmation*, the climax of the Archipelago sequence, was published in 1981, Priest was a major writer straddling sf and the more innovative reaches of mainstream literary fiction.

His later novels have borne out fully the promise of that combined stance, amounting to sf and fantasy written with all the technical resources of the mainstream. *The Glamour* (1984) is a penetrating, and masterfully ambiguous, summation of the causes and mechanics of the secret history; *The Quiet Woman* (1990) is a thoughtful near-future dystopia; *The Prestige* (1995), which won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, is an historical fantasy whose twin narratives interleave with the fabulous intricacy of the stage magics they describe; *The Extremes* (1998) is an intellectually and viscerally gripping thriller delineating the interface between virtual reality and violence. And now Priest has produced perhaps his most accomplished work yet, *The Separation*, published by Scribner UK in August 2002. A masterpiece of alternate history, setting out the possibilities for peace and war that competed for existence in 1941 in the aftermath of the Battle of Britain, this novel is a triumph of narrative art and historical speculation.

I interviewed Christopher Priest by e-mail in August 2002, with an emphasis on his recent writings.



# The INTERROGATION

**Christopher Priest**  
interviewed by  
**Nick Gevers**



NG: Contemplating your total *oeuvre*, there is a decided shift from your early sf writing to your later, more consciously mainstream, literary output. Yet all your “non-genre” books operate from recognizably science-fictional or supernatural premises. Are you still at root an sf and fantasy writer?

CP: Let's get something straight from the outset. I know I probably brought it on myself in the first place, but this idea of my having consciously gone over to “mainstream literary output” is not true. My approach to writing hasn't changed in the last 30 years. Obviously, anyone can make whatever they like of the stuff they see published, say it is this or that, give it a label.

But I would argue that in one special sense the books represent the visible tip of a kind of long-term argument. It's an essentially friendly argument I've been having with colleagues in the sf world, other writers, critics, readers. I once characterized it as a family disagreement amongst people who understood each other rather too well. It's about how science fiction should be written, what we should be doing with the stuff.

I began writing in the belief that the essence of science fiction (and incidentally of much of great literature too) was the speculative or visionary metaphor, handled seriously, tackled without compromise, but presented in an entertaining, realistic or readable manner. It's a prescription that governs all the great examples of science fiction. It's what got me going, what made me want to be a writer.

The problem is that that was in the mid-1960s. Since then, the images and ideas of sf have been comprehensively sold out to commercial interests, to TV and movies, to computer games and

advertising, to soft-brained sagas and trilogies and series and sequels. Many of my contemporaries have given in to this pressure; many of the new writers obviously accept it as the norm. I've met young writers who have declared that selling *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* tie-ins is a way in to the writing of legitimate sf. The typical sf shelf in most bookshops is now crammed with these undemanding TV or film tie-ins, along with paranoid androids, heroic trilogies or larky fantasies. The serious kind of sf has become marginalized.

I feel I have carried on in the way I started: I've now published eleven novels, all different from each other, none of them a sequel to any of the others, all of them with an original idea and based ultimately, as you say, on recognizable sf premises. I see each of them as an attempt to write traditional sf in a new or challenging way, the best I was capable of at the time I wrote it. I always assumed this was what the writers I admired were doing.

Now things have in general moved so far to the right wing of commercial opportunism that I'm viewed as a kind of would-be posh outsider. But in fact I see myself working within a clear and even conservative tradition created by Wells, Dick, Pohl, Sheckley, Aldiss, Ballard, Le Guin, Sladek, Wyndham.

I know I'm always being misunderstood on this subject, but it's really only here, in somewhere like *Interzone*, within the family, that I can speak plainly about it. I don't expect anyone to agree with me, but I want to get it out of the way.

NG: Virtually all your mature work is deeply concerned with issues of identity (thus recurrent doppelgängers) and memory (thus your extensive use of confessional narrative forms). Why this emphasis on the dubiety of the Self and the unreliability of recollection?

CP: They're all subjects that interest me, although I'm a bit dubious about dubiety. On the unreliability of recollection: All fiction is set in the past. It's a narrative form, based on storytelling. In our everyday lives stories are invariably misremembered. Anyone can try it: repeat a story you were told the other day, or describe something that happened to you last week. You never get it completely right: you have to improvise a little, blur details you can't quite recall, add a few twidly bits for emphasis – in short you make fiction of it. So the unreliability of memory is intrinsic to narrative, to fiction, and is therefore a principal subject for a modern novelist. The past is always uncertain.

NG: You are an acknowledged master of narrative structure: your complex

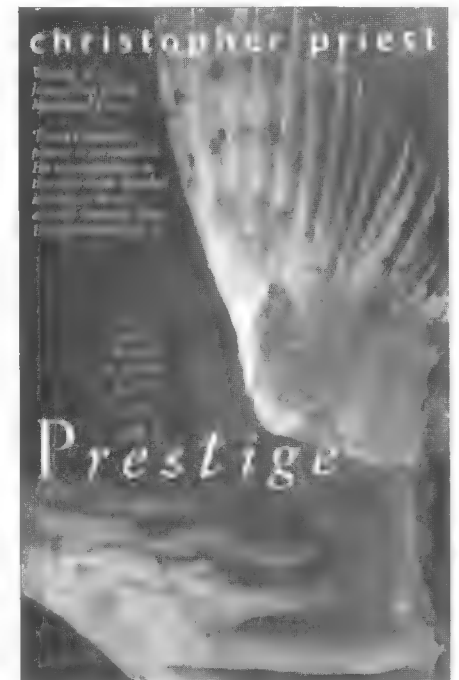
novelistic threads of character and meaning always seem choreographed to perfection, ultimately converging with the force of revelation. By what stages has your command of literary architecture evolved?

CP: I think I'm probably getting better at it as I go along, so I assume the answer to this question is simply that I keep trying. My first attempt to employ something like structure was when I was writing *Inverted World*. I managed things so that the climactic scene, the revelation of the state of the world, came almost exactly halfway through... a rising highpoint, like the poles of that world.

Narrative structure interests me, because it seems widely misunderstood. For me, much of the challenge of writing a novel these days is bound up with the structure. I see it as something that should ideally be invisible to the reader, in the way that anything made well does its job without drawing attention to how it's done.

I wouldn't want to give the impression that literary structure is something that interests me more than (say) drawing characters or setting a scene. I bang on about structure in particular because you don't hear much about it from other writers and a lot of people don't understand it. It's certainly something few editors seem to grasp.

NG: Your most recent collection, *The Dream Archipelago*, together with an additional long story, “The Discharge” (on *Sci Fiction*, [www.scifi.com/scifiction](http://www.scifi.com/scifiction)), bears an intriguing relation to your early masterpiece, *The Affirmation*. In that novel, the “Dream Archipelago” was essentially metaphoric, a reflection of a disturbed contemporary



individual's psychological crisis; yet in the story cycle, the islands are quite concrete, a harrowing secondary world. Why does the dream become tangible between one book and the other?

CP: The Dream Archipelago stories are an attempt to deal with various odd obsessions and phobias that seem to haunt or interest me. You're right: the islands are essentially metaphoric in *The Affirmation...* but the "concrete" descriptions in the short stories are also metaphoric. They have to be, don't they? It's just a question of emphasis. Look at the realist tradition in theatre, for instance.

Part of my long argument with the sf "family" concerns the dangers of taking things too literally. All fiction is metaphor. None of it is real. This is why sf novels shouldn't have glossaries of invented words, why fantasy shouldn't be published with a map showing where the bloody swamp is situated. Readers seem to want these things, but the writers should resist temptation. Dumbing down invariably follows. Once you try to make literal that which is metaphoric, the metaphor dies. If you can't write a novel without the glossary or the map, then you're making a pig's ear of it.

NG: The endless war raging in the world of the Dream Archipelago is a savage and meaningless one, a fact especially clear in "The Discharge." Did this imaginary conflict help draw your thoughts to the Second World War, subject of your new novel *The Separation*?

CP: The straightforward answer to your question is: No, I don't see that thematic link between the Dream Archipelago stories and WW2. When I began the Archipelago stories, the war background to the stories was my reaction to "proxy" wars: the way the superpowers would try out their new weapons and techniques in smaller, local wars. Ever since the end of WW2, war has been a constant feature in the life of the world: I read once that something like 140 different wars have been fought since 1945, most of them directly or indirectly sponsored by the big countries. (The number has undoubtedly increased since I learned that depressing fact.)

World War Two is a different matter: it was a conflict of global proportions, in which the superpowers were fully involved and committed. It had a drastic impact on the lives of millions of people, with a less dire but just as dramatic effect on millions of others. (In 1940, my father and elder sister were strafed by a German plane in Woking, Surrey; a few weeks later my father happened to be in Coventry on the night it was destroyed.) I was born

while the war was going on, although I have no reliable memories of any of it. I grew up in the immediate post-war world. All through my life WW2 has been lurking behind me, and I knew that in the end I should have to find a way of writing about it.

NG: In your very helpful bibliographic essay on the research that went into *The Separation* (online at [www.christopher-priest.co.uk](http://www.christopher-priest.co.uk)), you indicate your sources at length. You've described your long-standing urge to deal with this subject, but in summary: in a novel arguing a pacifist thesis, why World War Two? Why the Blitz and Britain's retaliatory raids on Germany? Why not, say, the First World War, which more observers, along with you, would agree was unnecessary, militarism gone mad?

CP: As a writer I respond to the imaginative impulse. In imaginative terms, the First World War seems to me to be ground so well trodden that there is almost nothing there for me. When I was young I read some of the memoirs of the war (Sassoon, Graves, etc.), mainly to find out what had gone on. Through those books I discovered the poetry. I was shocked and moved by the poetry. I felt then, and still feel now, that it would be inappropriate to try to write something from my nice safe position some 60 or 80 years after the events.

It's a genuine dilemma for a writer, because even superficial enquiry into that war reveals horrors on such a scale, militarism gone mad, as you say, that somehow you feel you have no right to call yourself a writer unless you attempt to tackle those subjects. But then you look more closely. How could someone like me presume to improve on Wilfred Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth"? How could you dare? How could you deal imaginatively with those experiences today, without getting your

emotions from the local Oxfam shop?

World War Two is a different matter. For one thing, many of the people who took part in it are still alive. Physical traces remain everywhere, even in central London. Two or three years ago I noticed that some buildings in Stuttgart were peppered with bullet holes; bomb damage caused by the RAF can still be seen all over Leipzig. Much of the political situation that exists today (for instance in the Middle East) can be traced directly to events in the war. The uniforms that people wore, the planes they flew, the ships they sailed, the homes they lived in, were not all that different from ours today. In addition, I had personal links: where and when I was born, what had happened to my family during the war, what the world was like in which I grew up.

And from the point of view of an imaginative writer seeking a theme, WW2 is still rich in possibilities. Many secrets remain; much is unexplained; people still have things to hide. That's how I came across the story of Rudolf Hess. It's a terrific mystery, hushed up by Churchill and the Soviets, a political hot potato, full of fabulous stuff for a novelist to look at. (There's information about the Hess mystery on my website, if people want to explore some of the fascinating books on the subject.)

NG: The counterfactual development at the heart of *The Separation*, peace between Britain and Nazi Germany in 1941, is an historical alternative a lot of people would consider nightmarish, the triumph of appeasement; yet you seem somewhat to approve of it. Wouldn't this "premature" peace simply have aggravated the horrors of Nazism, transferred suffering from the British to others? A Nazi-dominated Europe through the late 1940s and '50s...

CP: Well, *The Separation* is a book of ideas, with no particular agenda to

Christopher Priest (centre) with Paul McAuley (left) and Peter F. Hamilton



pursue, other than my own general anti-war sentiments. The so-called appeasers in the British government of the 1930s were all veterans of the First World War, who had seen the horrors at first hand and who were determined that nothing like that must ever happen again. To me, that's an honourable instinct, not a despicable one. Appeasement only became discredited after it failed, after war broke out, after Churchill took over. History is written by the victors, and history is now against appeasement. As a novelist, I don't give a stuff about historical consensus. I took the pacifist point of view that maybe there was, after all, something to appeasement.

NG: You do seem to assume that Nazism would in time have faded away of its own accord, much as Communism was to do, hardly needing a globally destructive war to bring it down. In your view, was Nazism's fundamental shallowness, its self-indulgent vulgarity and barbarity (well exhibited in *The Separation* in the figure of Rudolf Hess) evidence that it was simply a psychopathic flash in the pan?

CP: Yes. For the novel I worked with the idea that a Nazi government was inherently unstable, and that Hitler, without a war against Britain to sustain his position, would have been overthrown. Germany's true enemy was perceived by many Nazis, including Hitler himself, to be Soviet Russia.

This comes into *The Separation* and to a large extent it is borne out by the historical record. All through the war there were various attempts on Hitler's life, and covert approaches for peace talks with Britain were made surprisingly often. Much of this has been kept under wraps, for some reason.

NG: *The Separation* is rather serious in tone, but an "extract" from the famously rancid memoirs of Goebbels provides some hilarious light relief at an unexpected point. Is the extract entirely, or largely, genuine? How acute an observer do you think Goebbels was?

CP: I made it all up, but I pastiched Goebbels's style as closely as possible. When you read Goebbels you have to put aside many of your normal expectations of a book and remain as open-minded as possible. In the context of the senior Nazis, Goebbels was easily one of the most interesting, although also one of the nastiest. He wrote thousands of pages of diaries, and lies and exaggerations and distortions can be found on almost every one. Yet his atrocious attitudes, his bullying, his self-delusions, do make remarkably entertaining reading... a quality I set

out to capture in that imaginary extract. He's also brilliant on unexpected but sly observations, and odd but unverifiable facts. You can't trust a word he writes.

I wouldn't recommend his *Diaries* to anyone, but if you must read any of the Nazi literature, Goebbels is where to start. He's a sort of alternative history all on his own.

NG: Your characterization of Winston Churchill is highly intriguing, a mixture of dislike and admiration in the minds of your narrators generating a balanced, well-nuanced portrait. Do you see Churchill as a brilliant opportunist? Or a person of principle? It's interesting how, in making peace with Hess, he seems simultaneously to yield nothing...

CP: I was brought up by parents who worshipped Churchill. Like so many others of their generation, they had come through the war and felt that Churchill had saved the country. As a child growing up in a country that thought it had "won the war," and as someone who hadn't been involved, I couldn't dissent from this but I held no strong views. I have always admired Churchill's speeches, for instance. They still have the capacity to stir me.

Then in the early 1970s I read *The People's War* by Angus Calder, in which Calder described Churchill as an "utterly egregious man." I have to admit this shocked me, but it made me want to know more about Churchill. He was indeed a political opportunist, a warmonger, a troublemaker, a strikebreaker, an empire conservative, a self-publicist, a drunkard and much more. But he was a

compassionate man, he was brave, he had a sense of humour, he was ineradicably a brilliant war leader, his speeches can stop you dead in your tracks... and he wrote some of the finest English of the last century.

One of the challenges of writing *The Separation* was to try to convey some of this, to show how Churchill, acting within character, could conceivably have done an about-face and made a deal with Germany.

NG: Again on Churchill: I wondered to what extent he had ultimately planned all the events of the novel...

CP: That's getting a bit convoluted, even for me.

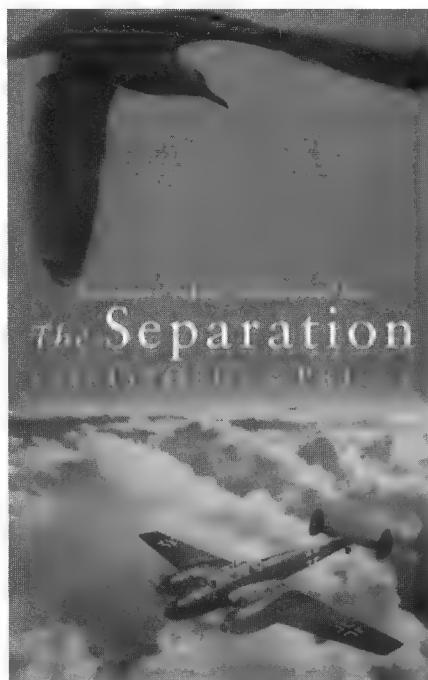
NG: Your protagonists in *The Separation*, the twin Sawyer brothers, begin as Olympic rowers, moving in harmony down the stream of time, only to diverge; and historical paths diverge with them. In the same manner as the decisions of Churchill and Hess, do you see the actions of obscure individuals as crucial to macro-historical outcomes?

CP: That's partly what the novel is about, of course. World War Two was fought for the most part by obscure or ordinary people. Many of them survived the war, and a considerable number of those survivors wrote books about their experiences. WW2 was populated by air-gunners, sappers, naval lieutenants, radio operators, nurses, dive-bomber pilots, air-raid wardens... many of them published their memoirs later.

These vernacular accounts, usually written in plain and unpretentious language, are rich in experience, emotion and graphic detail. Writers like Jack Currie, Russell Braddon, Don Charlwood and Richard Hillary are all but unknown these days, but their books are gripping and moving, in some ways equal to the trench poetry of the First World War.

NG: Do Jack and Joe Sawyer – the dashing bomber pilot, and the troubled pacifist – represent different elements of Englishness, the balanced halves of a national character?

CP: I didn't see them that way. Characters in my books are usually intended to stand only for themselves, not to carry symbolic baggage too. Of course, in times of war men and women do emerge who become seen as representing some kind of ideal. In WW2, people like Vera Lynn, Erwin Rommel, George Patton, Joseph Goebbels, William Joyce, Claude Eatherly and Winston Churchill fulfilled this role.





NG: Elements of autobiography in fiction: *The Separation* concerns identical twins, and you have twin children. Any connection between the two circumstances?

CP: Just a happy coincidence. My kids are fraternal twins, i.e. non-identical brother and sister. I had been planning *The Prestige* for a long time before they came along, and it was with that book that I started getting interested in twins. I dedicated the book to the children, but by then they were already five or six.

NG: In your alternate timeline, the Third Reich allows some Jews to escape to Madagascar (as was indeed proposed at one stage in our history); the state established there, Masada, seems to share the political and military dilemmas of contemporary Israel. And your parallel Europe of 1999 isn't that different from the one we know. In some ways, do even the most radical separations end in convergence?

CP: The Madagascar Plan has a vestige of historical respectability, in that it stems from the Germany of Bismarck's time. It was an idea for solving the Jewish "problem." That is, all the Jews in the world would be moved to Madagascar and left there. This has the same kind of ruthless thinking behind it as the Holocaust we know, but it does at least have the advantage that no genocide would have taken place. Winston Churchill, as an historian, would have been both attracted and repelled by the idea. What he is quoted as saying about it in *The Separation* is my own invention, but I believe it represents his actual views.

Madagascar (or the Republic of Masada, as I have it in the novel) is depicted as a secular Jewish state, roughly comparable to the Israel of our own world. It has become by the present day a democratic and civilized place, but one with many serious internal and external problems. I suppose you could say that this similarity to the modern state of Israel suggests there is a momentum to historical events that leads to convergence. But I don't see convergence as inevitable. In *The Separation*, the USA goes off in an entirely different direction, for instance, and the Soviet Union is dismantled.

NG: Having now published a major alternate history novel, or uchronia, or counterfactual: do you see *The Separation* as a book fundamentally different from the sf genre's alternate histories, in form and intent?

CP: This takes us back to what I was saying at the beginning. All my novels have the same sort of starting-line: a

standard or conventional sf riff, given a new treatment. Almost all "alternative histories" in the sf genre deal with results. History is said to have taken a different course, so that the present day we discover through the fiction seems subtly (or not so subtly) different. The Spanish Armada landed, Queen Victoria was assassinated, the South won the American Civil War, Napoleon prevailed, the Reformation didn't take place... and so on.

In *The Separation* I wanted to try something new: to examine not the results, but the process by which a "separation" of the historical ways might actually have taken place. The novel concentrates on the six months of the autumn and winter of 1940/41, during which a number of small, subtle changes of direction become apparent. I wanted to show that these changes could themselves be brought about not by big decisions or grand actions, but by more human things: by forgetfulness, jealousy, muddles, a confusion about identity, getting things wrong, a bump on the head, an intrusive neighbour, a borrowed motorbike. Other great events are going on at the same time – the Blitz on British cities, the war in North Africa, the fall of Greece and the Balkans, the peace mission of Rudolf Hess – but in a sense they are irrelevant, as are the political and social results in the present day. I was more interested in working out which of the two brothers was going to bed the girl.

If all that makes the book fundamentally different from other genre

books, then that's OK by me. I've never seen the point in going over old ground. For instance, it's 35 years since *Pavane* appeared. That's a novel that still has the capacity to thrill me. I re-read it just after Keith Roberts died and found it as marvellous as I remembered. *Pavane* defines and in a sense finalizes uchronia, because Keith did it better than anyone else, before or since. Because of that book, and a few of the others, alternative history is no longer a fruitful field in which to work. If you're not prepared to churn out glib rewrites of different bits of history (which is basically all that's left for others by books like *Pavane*), then you either have to leave uchronia alone or find a new way in which to address the form.

NG: Finally: what's next for you? Is the shape of your next novel apparent as yet?

CP: I'm currently recharging batteries, as they say, a tired old U-Boat bobbing up to the surface for a breath of fresh air. *The Separation* took a total of four years, of which two and a half years were spent actively researching or writing it.

I'm working gently on a new Dream Archipelago story at the moment. I've also started thinking about a new novel, with a theme so vast I keep hiding from it. At this general stage of planning a novel, sheer fright of an idea is a real experience for me. Only gradually does a writable book start emerging from the terror. **[Z]**

Christopher Priest with his wife and fellow author, Leigh Kennedy



# Little Green Card

Mat Coward

**K**nock-knock-knock, I open the door, guy standing there says: "I wanna emigrate."

It's like 4.30 in the morning, I got up so quickly I put my skin on back to front, and all so that a short stranger with a bad-smelling cigar in his mouth can tell me he wants to emigrate.

"So emigrate. It's a free country. Please yourself."

He shakes his head. "No, you don't understand. I want to emigrate to where you come from."

It's still 4.30 in the morning, and where I come from we like to sleep later than that. "You wouldn't like it," I say. "Where I come from, you can't smoke."

Small guy chuckles. The cigar wobbles. "I live in New York City," he says. "No Smoking signs don't scare me."

Meanwhile I'm closing the door on him, but he gets his foot in the way. Not that a foot is such a big deal, but by now it's 4.31 and I'm waking up a little and I'm beginning to realize that nothing like this has ever happened before in all the time I've been here. I look at his face for the first time, it's not a mad face as far as I can tell, and I begin to think *Uh-oh, maybe we've got a live one here.*

The guy says "Do you really wanna talk about this out here on the doorstep where anyone can hear your business?"

"I don't really want to talk about it at all," I explain. "I don't even know what we're talking about. Are you aware it's not even 4.33 in the morning yet?"

"Besides," he says, "this is an embassy, isn't it? The Embassy of the Planet 9Gamma?"

I begin to think *well, you know, maybe he's right at that.* You don't necessarily want the neighbours hearing a whole lot of crazy talk. Or even, at just gone 4.30 in the morning, the milkman. I invite the short guy in.

"Gary," he said, as I helped him out of his heavy coat. "Gary Parks." We shook hands. It would have been easier if we'd finished taking his coat off first, but he was eager.

"Pleased to meet you, Gary, and my name is—"

"Your Excellency," said Gary. "That is, I believe, the correct form of address for those of ambassadorial rank."

"Well, suit yourself. I usually go by Ritchie."

He pointed his cigar up at me. "That accent. That's a total giveaway."

"It's a Lancashire accent, Gary. Not especially common here on the south coast, but certainly not unique. Listen, come through to the kitchen, I'll get the kettle on."

I watched him for signs of disappointment as we entered the kitchen, but I didn't see any. Which was slightly disconcerting. The kitchen was small – just about room enough for us both to sit down by the fire, if we didn't mind our knees bumping. It was a small house, a terraced house, two bedrooms, one living room. Built to house Victorian working folk. Nothing grand about it.

"Have a seat, Gary. Tea?"

"Sure. What's that?"

"This? This is a gas lighter." I lit the flame under the kettle with the hand-held sparker. "See? What, you don't have these in New York?"

"I'm all electric."

"What did you think it was?" I pointed it at him.

He rubbed at his nose a little. "I don't know. Immobilizer ray, or whatever. I'm not really a technology guy."

"Well, it's a gas lighter. Has a battery in the handle. Lights the gas. Milk and sugar?"

"Sure. Thanks." While the tea was standing, I took the opportunity to scratch my lower spine. It was itching me to buggery-and-back.

"You in pain, Your Excellency?" He was staring at my contorted features, and he sounded concerned. Or excited.

"Ritchie," I said.

"Sure, Ritchie. You're not having a heart attack, are you?"

"No, no, it's nothing. I've just got my skin on back to front."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Gary, and he stood up and turned his back on me.

Nice manners, Americans have. So, I thought – hell, why not? I made my adjustments, and then I said: “OK, that’s better. Sit down, Gary, your tea’s just about ready.”

“That happens a lot, I suppose. With the skin, I mean.”

I poured the tea. “So, Gary – you’re a long way from home.”

He put sugar in his tea. “Aren’t we all, Ritchie?”

I sat down opposite him. “What brings you to the UK? Specifically, to an English seaside resort in the off-season?”

He stirred his tea for a while, then he said: “I thought I made that clear, Your Excellency. I wish to apply for permission to emigrate. To your homeland.”

I don’t take sugar, so I had nothing to stir. “Gary, look, I don’t know what you think–”

“What I know,” he said, “never mind what I think, what I know is that you people have been here for several decades, at the very least, that the governments of the Earth know about you, and deal with you, that your presence here has been kept a secret from the peoples of the Earth so that the rich and powerful can keep control of all your technology for themselves, and that this here is your Embassy to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It’s a secret embassy, obviously, which is why it looks like such a dump.”

I laughed. “A secret deal between space aliens and politicians? Oh please, Gary! Next you’ll be telling me all about the secret Jewish world government, and the Catholics and the Communists and the – what do you call them – Illuminators?”

“Illuminati,” said Gary.

“There you go! Illuminati. There you go. Them and the Jews, huh?”

He banged his teacup down in its saucer. “No, no, please, I’m not one of those crazies! I’m not one of those conspiracy nuts. For God’s sake, me anti-Semitic? Please, my ex-wife was Jewish.”

I gave him what they call in Lancashire an “old-fashioned” look. “Your ex-wife was Jewish, and you tell me you’re not an anti-Semite?”

He chuckled. His cigar didn’t wobble, because he’d already put it out. “Actually, she’s – I call her my ex-wife, but in fact she’s dead.”

Ah. Well, that made sense of things a bit. “I’m sorry. My sympathies, Gary, I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Yeah, about 18 months ago. Matter of fact, that’s one of the reasons I want to emigrate. Nothing much left for me here.”

“Sure, sure. Of course. I’m sorry. Look, you ever had a Full English Breakfast?”

“No, I guess not.”

“Me neither. Tell you the truth, I don’t think it actually exists. Except in the imagination of the Tourist Board. All anyone in this country eats for breakfast is cereal. One thing I loved about New York when I was there, everyone goes out for breakfast. They still do that?”

“Yeah, I guess.” He reached into his coat pocket. “I brought all my documents with me.”

I walked over to the refrigerator and began rooting around in there. “I think I’ve got some bacon in here,

somewhere. Eggs, maybe a few tomatoes. That and some fried bread, what do you say? Go down well on a cold morning, wouldn’t it?”

He came up and stood behind me, and shoved something towards me. It was a US passport.

“Well,” I said. “An American with a passport. There’s a rarity.” I dug out the frying pan, and chucked in some rashers.

“Yeah, we’re not exactly the best-travelled people in the galaxy are we? But I guess you could say I’m sort of a deracinated Yank.”

“Oh? How do you mean?”

“You know. The years I’ve spent researching – all this.” He waved a hand around at the little kitchen. “You guys, and everything. I suppose I think of myself as more of an Earthman than an American, really.”

I added the tomatoes to the pan. “You do eat bacon, do you?”

“Sure. I like bacon.” He sat down again, and drank some more of his tea. “Smells good, in fact.”

“Help yourself to more tea. There’s plenty in the pot.”

“Thanks, I’m good. Matter of fact, I have two passports.”

“Two?”

“Yeah, my mother was British.”

“Get away. From around here?”

“No, from somewhere in Scotland. West Scotland I think.”

“An American who doesn’t know precisely where his Scots ancestors came from? Now that *is* a rarity!”

He didn’t join in the joke this time. “Well, see, she died when I was young.”

“Oh, mate – I’m sorry.”

“Yeah. Just a kid, really. Her and me both, I mean.”

“I’m sorry, Gary. You’ve had a tough time. What about your father, was he British too?”

“No, he was – no, he wasn’t British.”

Breakfast was ready, and it went down well. While we ate, I wondered what I was going to do about Gary. Whether I was going to be kind, but efficient. Or whether I was just going to be efficient.

“Suppose,” I said, “that all you believe were true.”

Gary nodded. “Sure.” I was washing and he was drying. He was more meticulous about drying than I was about washing.

“Just supposing, I mean. What makes you think you can just walk in off the street, onto the sovereign territory of another nation, and simply expect to be given emigration rights? Just like that? You wouldn’t get far at Australia House with that approach, I’ll tell you. At 4.30 in the morning.”

He put down the tea towel. “See, that’s why I brought all my documents. I’ve got my passports–”

“I know, I know.”

“– my birth certificate, my health insurance, my–”

“But, Gary, there’s more to it than that. Even if I was who you thought I was, I couldn’t just immigrate you by clicking my fingers. It doesn’t work like that.”

He put his hands in his pockets, and looked at the floor.



"What, you don't think I'd make a good citizen? Well, I think I would, I think I could – I'm good at fitting in. For instance, I'm not Jewish, but my ex-wife's family, they accepted me one hundred per cent right from the start. That's the sort of guy I am. I'm an adaptable guy."

I put a hand on his shoulder, and made him look at me. "Gary, Gary! I think you'd make a great citizen. You're a hell of a nice guy, I can see that. You are a diamond geezer, a good bloke. I just don't have the authority. I mean, even if I were who you think –"

"Ambassadors can do that." He was still sulking. "I looked it up."

"Not this one," I said. "I'm sorry."

He went over to his chair and picked up his coat. "Maybe I should try one of your other embassies. I found this one, I can find the others."

I got between him and the door. Not being too obvious, I hoped, but I got there all the same. "Gary, listen – sit down. How's this? All right? Sit down, I'll get a pad from my office, I'll take down your details. All right? I can't really say fairer than that."

"Sure. OK." He sat down. "Sure. An official form – is that what you're saying? It's an official immigration form, and you're going to fetch it from your office."

"That's it," I said. "An official form. You wait there." I fetched a plain yellow legal pad from my bedside table – sometimes I wake up at night and I write poems to help me sleep – and a ballpoint pen and a plastic folder to put the pad in. I looked at another thing, a kind of sharp little thing, which I might have picked up, but I left it where it was, pretty sure I didn't need it. Sad, really, if you think about it one way, but there you go: I was pretty sure I wouldn't be needing it.

Gary was where I'd left him. That was sad too, in a way.

"OK," I said. "Let's get some details down. See what happens from there."

"Sure," said Gary. "Thanks. I have all my documents right here."

He told me stuff and I pretended to write it down. Squiggle-squiggle, what did he know?

"Is that what writing looks like on 9Gamma?" he said.

"No," I told him. "This is shorthand. I learned it at Brighton Tech."

Name, address, date of birth... then name, address, date of birth.

"I just gave you –"

"Everything has to be done in triplicate, Gary. Obviously."

He held up a palm to acknowledge his *culpa*. "Of course, of course." He shifted around in his seat, fiddled with the buttons of his coat across his lap. "Sure, I understand. Of course." Name, address, date of birth.

Occupation of applicant. "What do you do for a living there in Gotham, Gary?"

"I used to work as assistant manager of a small bakery. My ex-wife's family –"

"Hold on, Gary: used to work? What are you telling me, you're unemployed?"

"No, no – listen! I'm not unemployed, I mean the job's still there if I want it. I just mean, you know, I gave it up so I could –"

"OK, Gary. Occupation of applicant...?"

Mother's details, father's details. Snag. Hesitation. Applicant looks uncomfortable.

"What is it, Gary? You don't know your father's place of birth? Don't worry about that, that's nothing to be –"

"What it is, Your Excellency..."

"I'm Ritchie."

"The thing is... Look, hey, I'm not saying this to blame you, I mean I'm not looking for compensation or anything but – I think my father might have been one of your people."

I shook my head. "Impossible."

"What it is, Ritchie – I believe my mother was what they call an abductee."

I put the pad down. "Gary, there's no such thing."

"No, but what I'm saying –"

"The people who you think I am – if they existed, those people, I can tell you now, categorically, they don't go around abducting people."

"You don't?"

"No, Gary. You might find this hard to believe, but having travelled uncounted billions of miles through the dark wastes of infinite space, the first thing we want to do when we arrive isn't pick up a bubba's wife outside a truck stop, sodomize her, and dump her in a turnip field in Arkansas."

He had to sit back with that one for a while. Run it through his head, with his lips moving and his eyes screwed up. "But all those people – all those abductees. I mean, there's hundreds of thousands of them. They can't all be lying or mad."

I put my elbows on the table between us and leant forward and looked right in his eyes and said quietly: "Gary, why not?"

He looked back at me and beyond me and eventually he said: "Well, yeah, now you come to mention it, no reason at all. I guess. Well, shit, what do you know."

"OK, so father's place of birth – unknown. Thrice unknown."

"Is that going to be a problem? Could that count against me? Because, maybe –"

"I don't see it being a big issue, Gary, in the long term. Relax. Don't worry about it. Let's move on." I pretended to read back my shorthand under my breath while I tried to think up some more questions. I wanted to do this properly. Efficient and kind, I was going for.

"The unemployment thing," said Gary, not taking the silence very well. "I could get a reference letter, I mean I'm sure I could get that faxed over here if –"

I shook my head. "Not important. What is important: what skills etcetera would you bring to your new land?"

Gary took a cigar out of his coat pocket, lit it, apologized and asked if I minded. I didn't. "Skills?"

"Skills etcetera," I said. "In your own words." I leant back, pen behind my ear, arms crossed.

"Well... like I said, I don't really have that much going on in New York any more. Also –"

"That's not a skill, Gary, nor an etcetera. It's a personal sadness, which is a different thing." Cruel to be kind. Kind and efficient. Doing it properly.

"Sure, right, but I was going to say – I can mix real well. I'm a good mixer. I get on with people."

"People?"

"Yeah, yeah – you know, people of all races and colours and... What can I tell you? I'm easygoing." He frowned. "I guess it's not much, when you look at it. And I don't suppose you have a whole big crying-out need for bakery managers where you come from."

"In Lancashire? No, all vacancies taken. But don't put yourself down. What you said – that's true. You do get on with people. I don't usually open up my kitchen to complete strangers at 4.30 in the morning, believe me. I opened up for you, didn't I? Cooked you an English breakfast. That's a useful skill, in anybody's language."

"It is?"

"Sure. Look how far it's got you here today. I'm going to write it down. Under 'what skills etcetera,' I'm going to put 'exceptional interpersonal abilities'."

"OK. Great."

Squiggle-squiggle. Going well, kind and efficient, but I was running out. Going to have to be efficient and kind now. "OK, Gary, that's about it."

"It is?"

Scanning the squiggles, nodding my head, "Yup... uh-huh... right... Yeah, that's the lot. What I'm going to do now, I'm going to run this through the computer downstairs."

He went pale, and his cigar went out. "Oh God. Really? Oh God. Thanks."

"So let me shake your hand and wish you good luck, and you just sit there while I–"

"How long will it take, do you think? Until I get an answer? Will it be today?"

"Half an hour, something like that." I didn't want to drag it out any longer, I'd done my bit, surely-to-hell. "An hour, depends how busy the network is."

"Sure. Yeah, sure. God, I don't believe it. Wish me luck."

"Good luck," I said. I poured him a glass of brandy, and he drank half of it straight off and said *wish me luck* so I wished him luck. And then something else came out of my mouth, as if my mouth wasn't really under my control, as if it was sovereign territory, a bit like when I wake up in the night and write poetry and in the morning I don't know what I've written until I look at the yellow pad.

I said: "Aren't you afraid they'd have to kill you?"

"What?"

"If you went to a secret alien embassy and knocked on the door and said you knew all about them. Wouldn't they have to kill you, don't you think, because they couldn't let you walk around with all that secret knowledge?"

Gary seemed pretty relaxed about that. "Well, I don't know why they would." He meant it, I could tell by his face, by the set of his shoulders. "I certainly don't know any more now than I did when I came in. Except that you

don't abduct people and I don't know why you wouldn't want that getting out – unless maybe you have shares in one of the supermarket tabloids."

He laughed, and I sort of did too. "Now there's an idea! My accountant missed a trick there."

"Anyhow, you don't want to kill people."

"No?"

"No, hell. You don't like killing people. Who does, except crazy psychos? And doctors. Whole lot easier, seems to me, you just give me my little green card, I emigrate, then everyone's happy. Well, everyone except my plumber – I owe him 200 bucks that he's never going to see in this life, the cheating little shit."

"You don't strike me as the sort to stiff a tradesman," I said.

"Well, this guy, he pretty much stiffed me to begin with."

"Then, fair enough, I guess."

"Besides, going back to if you'd kill me and all that, I've got this." From underneath the coat on his lap he produced the gas lighter. He showed it to me, but he was careful not to point it at me.

All it was was a gas lighter, it came with the stove, but I didn't say anything about that.

I sat in the basement for a while, thinking, twiddling with a few things. Give it half an hour, I was thinking. Make it look right. When he's gone, I'll go back to bed, catch up a bit. Where I come from people don't get up at 4.30 in the morning, not for anything.

I lasted ten minutes, then I had to go back to the kitchen. Half an hour was beyond my powers.

This thing I had buzzing in my head was neither efficient nor kind, because really I couldn't imagine what alternative ending there was except that there wasn't one. But kind and efficient to me. In the solemn name of insomnia, I had to say this one last thing to him.

He stood up as I entered the kitchen. His eyes asked. His shoulders pleaded. His cigar lay forgotten. The gas lighter was back on the counter next to the stove.

"Gary, you know I said you couldn't smoke where I come from?"

"Oh, sure, I forgot." He looked around for his cigar, found it, started stubbing it out.

"No, that's not my point, enjoy your cigar. My point is, you can't smoke there because – well, to simplify things somewhat, to put it simply, there's no oxygen. No air."

"Oh. OK, I understand."

"Do you understand? A human being landing on my planet is going to survive for about one second." A lot less than that, probably, but I was simplifying. "It's physically impossible for humans to live there."

He made a smile with half his face and said: "Then how come you can live here?"

"Oh Gary, think about it! Think about it, will you – we're superior beings, man! We are zillions of years ahead of you in every way."

"Oh. Oh yeah, sure, I forgot."

"We came to your planet, remember. You didn't come to ours."

He nodded. I wished he'd smoke his cigar. "Sure, yeah, sure. Obviously."

"I mean, Gary, I'll tell you how advanced we are – where I come from not only don't we abduct abductees, but we wouldn't even think up such a crazy story. That's how advanced we are – even our liars and our crazy people are a zillion years ahead of yours."

I was panting a little. A zillion years of superiority, and I was panting. I didn't know what I wanted his reaction to be. Either way, it couldn't change the end, only the details. I think I just wanted him to get it.

"Thing is," he said, "if I'm a kind of half-breed, like I suspect–"

"I thought I explained that."

"Yeah, but I'm just saying, *if*. You know?"

I sat down next to him. Our knees bumped. "Have a cigar, Gary. In fact, give me one of those, will you?" We smoked our cigars. He tried to speak once or twice, but I shushed him. I just wanted to be quiet and enjoy the smoke. Wasn't a bad cigar. Not Cuban, but not bad.

When we'd finished, he said: "I figure I'll take my chances, you know?"

I stood. He stood. "Gary, in that case, I have some very good news for you."

"The computer?"

"Yes, the computer has processed your application, and – well, you're in."

"Oh my God."

I squiggled on the yellow pad and showed it to him. "You know what that is?"

He shook his head.

"That is your citizenship number. Eventually, you're going to have to memorize that, but you can worry about that at the other end."

"OK. Oh my God."

"Well, if you're about ready...?"

"What about – do I need papers? You haven't given me any papers, and I don't know if I can memorize my citizenship number right away, because the script is unfamiliar, so–"

"Of course." I looked around the kitchen, and saw a small bit of metal lying on the windowsill. "I have to do something, Gary, and I'm afraid it's going to hurt a little. Actually, it's going to hurt. Forget I said little."

"OK, sure."

It did hurt, and he was delighted. He looked at the metal piercing the flesh of his arm.

"When you get there, Gary–"

"It looks just like a paperclip."

"That's right, it's supposed to. When you get there, this will convey all the necessary information to the authorities at the other end. You just show them this, and they'll take it from there." I was in a hurry now. I wanted to get back to bed, that's all I wanted to do, even if it meant writing poetry, I just wanted to get back to bed. I gave him a paper towel for the blood on his arm, and I took him down to the basement, and I sent him through. From kitchen to destination, the whole thing took about two minutes, so as it turns out the last substantive words of his life were *It looks just like a paperclip*.

Later I asked around and I discovered that although this was the first time this had ever happened to me, and the first time I'd ever heard of it, it wasn't the first time it had ever happened. Every now and then, it seems, some crazy Earthman – well, maybe that's not fair; crazy, they could be, or idealistic, or ambitious, or all three or something else altogether – anyway, some person will turn up at the door of one of our places, demanding citizenship or asylum or a guided tour, or wanting to sell us some coloured beads. And what we generally do in such cases, it seems, is kill the poor bastards and dispose of them via the basement. Or else turn them over to the native authorities and let them deal with it.

I think my way was kinder. At least my poor bastard got a decent breakfast inside him first. A proper, stick-to-the-ribs English breakfast. When he'd gone, I came back upstairs, and opened the windows to let the smoke out, and screwed up the yellow squiggle sheets and tossed them on the fire in the tiny kitchen.

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**Mat Coward**, who lives in Frome, Somerset, and is on a roll, appeared in the last two issues of *Interzone* – with the sly sf tale "Time Spent in Reconnaissance" (no. 181) and the creepy horror story "Early Retirement" (no. 182). He has also written many crime stories, reviews and humorous pieces for a variety of markets.

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# Fame

*Timons Esaias*

The whole thing was perfect. Just amazingly, once-in-a-lifetime, cineholomegastar perfect. The infant slipped from his distracted nanny's arms, teetered on the edge of the parapet nine floors up the atrium of the Rye Mall, and fell. Stephen barely saw this in his not-enough-morning-coffee haze, tracked it briefly in the utmost periphery of his peripheral vision, standing on the down escalator between the eighth floor – Home Surgery Supplies, Exerbots, Recreational Alkaloids – and the seventh floor – Cabana Boys 4U, Stud-Finders, Chippendale Home Dancers, Men-with-Tools – and instinctively and at the last possible instant reached out with two cradling arms and not only caught the headfirst-falling boy, but redirected him smoothly into safety, head up, and cradled comfortably in Stephen's unaccustomed arms.

Stephen's soul surged with good feeling, the endorphin rush of success in the face of catastrophe. The searing glow of heroism. Thinking quickly he stepped off the escalator, leaned out over the parapet railing and looked up into the panicked visage of the soon-to-be-jobless nanny two stories up and shouted, "I'll wait here on seven!" and then ducked back in to get out of the slightly yucky – but in no way spoiling the moment – rain of spittle the nanny had launched with her first and still-echoing scream.

Mall security was all over him like investors on a pyramid scheme, their supervisors already smelling a Really Big Lawsuit in the works if everything didn't go just right. They'd caught the kid's bar-code from the video cameras, identifying the lucky cherub as one Dagon Tuttle-Halley-Boppson, male, 22 months, and already faxed all three parents to alert them to the situation. Two ambulobots from rival services were scanning the youngster for every bump, bruise, break, bacterium, parasite, virus, prion or inadvertently swallowed coin he could possibly have encountered in his recently threatened young life. All three parents, the nanny, their insurers, and the Mall's legal representatives were already being pummeled with increasingly detailed and fluctuating bids for service from the ambulobot companies and six different nearby ERs. The various competing AI shopping programs took nearly two minutes to hammer out a deal and

agree to let charming little Dagon be strapped onto the gurney extension of the lowest bidder and shunted off to the hospital with the most reasonable cost-to-waiting-time ratio.

Stephen never did meet the nanny whose fumble he had recovered, as she had been whisked sympathetically yet firmly into investigative custody – 13th floor – where the loosely gathered threads of her illegal immigrant life would be thoroughly unravelled in preparation for her eventual rehabilitation by talk shows and uplifting, if imaginative, docudramas in the various Teletales-of-the-Moment to be presented later in the week.

If it weren't for the looting spree concurrently in progress downtown in the software district – a riot touched off by the controversial result of the third game of the World Championship Chess Match and making for a highly photogenic event with hundreds of cubicle-cogs throwing aside their usual dogged and subservient manners to smash windows and madly toss the latest updates through the air like their primitive forebears tossing chaff on a threshing floor, their Regency-revival wigs askew, and the knickers and hose suffering considerable indignity – the Press would have been onto Stephen instantly. As it was, he had been able to hand over little Dagon and accept the congratulations of three different Mall cops before the tell-tale sonic boom of an approaching paparazoid rattled every pane of glass in the building and alerted one and all that Something Coverable Had Happened.

Every craning neck in the area immediately swerved down to look at the latest input from their personal media uni-unit. Hijacked video of young Dagon's sudden descent and miraculous recovery already reeled across the screen, along with appropriate dramatic insertions – hovering protective angels on Seraphinet, hovering protective aliens on Roswell.antigov, distorted perspectives on Dalinews, togas and drapery on Forumworld – before the paparazoid took its first live video and began aiming parabolic microphones at every person in sight. The patent on exclusive coverage of Stephen, Hero of the Moment, appeared on file in Washington DC. Seven thousand media AIs worldwide pondered offers for the exclusive story. Every detail about Stephen's life available in every accessible

database on the Earth, the Moon, and the cooperative Trojatats began collating in the paparazzoid's company mainframe at HolisticHotnews Ltd.

Stephen had turned to face the paparazzoid as it flew up from the curry court and attached itself to the railing just four feet away. He had never seen one up close, and was stunned by the complexity of its shape, and the dozens of mutating extensions it seemed to be extruding all over. He missed the little ATM-like drawer that suddenly filled with a modest sum of cash, just as the droid asked its first hopeful question. "Would you kindly tell our viewers just what happened, and how you managed such a heroic and miraculous rescue?"

Stephen, still failing to notice the cash or to understand its legal and contractual implications, told the story. He was humble, but flushed with happiness and relief. It made great copy, great mass appeal, tremendous sympatheticals, first-rate weepy three-tissue stuff. The proffered cash disappeared quietly back into the machine. Implied Consent forms autofiled in the local, state and Federal Courthouses, and HolisticHotnews stock rose three points on news of the saved expense.

With one spontaneous answer Stephen's story, his data, his life, and personal access had become the sole and eternal property of a company in Savannah, Georgia which, among other things, had bought out the company that had employed Stephen's father when Stephen had just started college and had fired the old man for being narrow-minded about the use of rhinoceros horn in Viagraplus, which blotted the old man's employability applet so badly that Stephen had to downgrade to technical school and give up the idea of mating with a human female on anything but a pay-as-you-go basis, which is only right since sex, as everyone knows, is the chief incentive and Fundamental Commodity in a market economy, and therefore can't be wasted on the underfunded.

By the time Stephen had answered the third question he had already been awarded six knighthoods, had 120 medals struck in his honour in 57 countries, and had over 700,000 e-ducats credited to his instantly established Honour Fund at the Isles of Scilly Bank of The Happily Untraceable Electron. His air-brushed visage graced the cover of cereal boxes rolling off the line in 27 different factories – proceeds the property of HolisticHotnews Holdings Inc. – and his sperm, as yet undonated, had leapt to number four on the Most Requested list at Hera's Reproductive Health Spa in Rabat, Morocco, and number seven at the exclusive bistro A Taste of Celebrity in Bangkok. His body had been morphed onto the generic male actor in millions of personalized Afternoon Delight.gov Soap-interactives all across the Americas.

The home page for Hell Hounds of Hubris (formerly Fatwas-of-the-Famous) had already posted a 50,000 e-ducats reward for his severed head or other significant body part. His photograph, shaking hands with important politicians, blossomed everywhere.

Stephen's media service kit, just about the cheapest available, crashed almost instantly under the strain of

tens of thousands of party invitations, scores of thousands of endorsement offers, hundreds of threats of personal violence, and millions of offers of every conceivable personal service. The 1.2 billion congratulatory e-mails generated in the first dozen minutes of his celebrity could obviously never be read, and barely even contemplated in his lifetime. The solarsystemic village had reached out to pat him on the back. Humankind respected him. His approval rating exceeded that of Santa Claus and Sherlock Holmes. There was talk of a bronze equestrian – winged, of course – statue of him to grace the centre of New Dzerzhinsky Square.

His provider quickly sensed the benefits of their suddenly interesting client, and provided an instant capacity upgrade while touting themselves as The Network of Stephen Kidkatcher.

A few minutes later, express-elevated to the gracious comfort of the Mall's executive penthouse hospitality suite, surrounded by more double-hide leather furniture than most people saw in a lifetime, faced with an intimidating display of liquor bottles, wine lists, mustard selections, tea caddies, buzzdust tubes and sweetmeat salvers, Stephen excused himself and slipped into the necessary. The paparazzoid stayed discreetly outside, sliding only two very thin probes under the door while it waited.

Stephen took his time. He had a lot to absorb. One glance at his uni-unit, now active again, made it clear his life would never be the same.

His mind went back to the catch again. Such a sublime moment. Was that what great sportstars experienced in the climactic moments of a winning game? He suspected he knew how thrill-duellists felt when they realized the crumpling body wasn't theirs. Why couldn't all life be like this?

Unfortunately, as he would soon discover, it already wasn't. The public's hidden agendas were making inroads on his image. His anal temperature – estimated by IR scan – was updated and broadcast every 20 seconds on RectumNet. RealTrueStory had already documented his long sorry history of fashion *faux pas*, as preserved by security cameras in his school, his building, and the bar where he had five times, unsuccessfully, tried to get a date back in his foreshortened freshman days when he still had prospects. RealTrueStory's proprietary presentation software sharply accentuated the frowziness and slovenliness of his clothes, his hair, his skin, and the two women who glanced at him for more than three seconds before changing their minds and looking elsewhere.

His school grades, public record, were now common knowledge. Talksites debated their relevance to his eventual heroism. Punditware raised the question of whether someone with his pitiful opinion-polling record deserved public praise, despite having kept a child from splashing spectacularly onto the concrete floor of the curry court. Other punditware questioned what lesson little Dagon would take from this failure to reap the consequences of an injudicious tumble. The possibility of the child's being scarred for life came up. Stephen's catching technique came in for some pointed criticism.

Unfounded rumours circulated that Stephen hung around malls he couldn't afford to shop in just on the off chance of a falling child. Conspiracyware brought up the possibility of collusion with the nanny.

Millions of people expressed the thought that this Stephen thing seemed way too good to be true.

The tide turned before he'd even zipped up his pants. His preferences in cineholo rentals presented a sharp contrast in character, at least to many in the public, even those who had rented the same holos. A still photo of him actually cheering for the Mets, including a skin-tone analysis of probable level of intoxication – far too low to excuse the behaviour – shattered his popularity among all right-thinking Norte Americanos.

Schoolyard pranks were remembered, and rose to haunt him. As did some unfortunate remarks about certain minorities. As did a few ill-considered and poorly presented lies he had told along the way. As did the fact that a second cousin, whom he had never actually met, of whom in fact he had never heard, had been convicted of an ugly series of child and pet molestations.

Lawsuits cropped up, from thousands of aggrieved acquaintances, or those who felt that they were at least pretty sure they were acquainted, and most certainly aggrieved. Much of his reward fund rolled over into a legal defence fund.

Stephen opened the door of the restroom to find two beefy guards waiting to escort him quickly from the building. His polls had slipped dramatically. The paparazzoid asked him how he felt about the public's sudden rejection of him.

He stammered some sort of reply about not knowing anything about it.

"Didn't you consult your uni-unit while you were in the bathroom? Surely you must have discovered what is being said about you on the Net?"

"I just checked the e-mail queue and a headline or two."

"Is this another one of your prevarications, like the time you told your fifth-grade instruction program that you had lost your homework in a gel-drive splash, but you'd really spent the whole weekend playing Towelhead Megakillathon, Intergalactic Edition?"

Stephen's answer did not mollify the public. In fact, he grew increasingly irritable and curt as the machine pumped more and more questions at him. With each snippy reply and whining complaint he lost credibility. His cereal boxes were recycled before they had even been filled. Coverage of him shifted from feelgood channels to scandalsheets. The hospital's announcement that little Dagon appeared to be completely unharmed brought sighs of relief worldwide. Most felt that it was no thanks to Stephen.

Unused to celebrity, Stephen kept asking the droid to leave him alone, amply demonstrating his guilty conscience to all who cared to watch. He even objected when the machine followed him into his apartment and began searching his personal effects. He kept turning his back on the paparazzoid, though the thing just reached a camera boom around him and kept shooting.

After an hour Stephen stopped answering the questions. He called in sick at work, and they fired him because they could see he wasn't ill on their screens. He stormed out of the apartment, only to discover that, with a paparazzoid following him closely and a fleet of them hovering outside the proprietary coverage zone for distant glimpses, a man is pointed at and recognized everywhere. Righteous viewers threw things at him, spat on him. Called him vile names.

The droid chronicled his every move for the next three days. It made a moving and thorough study of Stephen's fits of rage, alternating with ever more frequent bouts of indifference that eventually dissolved into long crying jags. No descent into madness and degradation had ever been more thoroughly documented, despite the fact that Stephen answered none, and acknowledged very few, of the 17,000 questions the machine put to him during this phase.

It all eased the burden of the euthanasia committee considerably.

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**Timons Esaias** is a poet and short-story writer who lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He has appeared in *Interzone* six times before, most recently with "Osmund Considers" (issue 179) and "Pawn" (issue 180).

# interzone

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Understandably nervous of the curse of *Postman* and pretty much all other apocalypse survivor movies, somebody in marketing has done their utmost to promote *Reign of Fire* as a large number of things it's not. The now-notorious poster promises live apocalypse with dragons torching Whitehall, when the film itself presents the end of the world only as a collection of faded news clippings and fragmented flashbacks (including a rather carefully composed *Time* cover of Manhattan in flames). Less misleading, but if anything still more of a hostage, is the trailer, which breaks with protocol in trying to whip up excitement by unrestrained use of the key money shots from the final act, including the actual climactic footage of a central character's death; so that everything preceding our heroes' arrival in dragon-infested London suffers from get-on-with-it syndrome, and everything that follows suffers from seen-it-already.

It'll be a shame if this hurts box-office performance, because beneath its ill-fitting mask of daff summer-apocalypse movie, *Reign of Fire* is an impressive, risky attempt at reinventing the master narrative of British sf for a post-modern international audience. Rather than trying to reconcile the radically different British and

American strains of the subgenre, its solution is to throw them into the pot together and let them make it work. The result is a film that is both a celebration of the strategy of

getting the family through the dark age with big woolly jumpers and an allotment of tomato frames, while Matthew McConaughey's pumped-up military survivalist and his looney band of irregulars are spoiling instead to fight fire with firepower. Needless to say, a Hegelian synthesis emerges from the punchup, but what's impressive is how comparatively staunchly the pressures to a more Hollywood arc are resisted. Though D-Day resonances are allowed free range, the overall feel is still far closer to Wyndham than Heinlein.

Authentically damp and miserable as only Co. Wicklow shoots can be, it's boldly set in the grim oop-north, an evocative landscape of crumbling medieval keeps and abandoned industrial workings, with only brief excursions in prologue and climax to a surprisingly dodgy before-and-after London (clearly not filmed there, though still an indispensable and very welcome homage to the tradition from which it descends). This isn't at all to say it misses as popular entertainment. It's a treat in itself to watch two such alpha-male leading men – one career on the way up, one gracefully spiralling down – sorting out their billing issues by taking every eyeball-wrestling opportunity to act out their differences at close quarters. McConaughey has never been better (or

indeed any good at all, really); while it's surely only Bale's dodgy London accent and Captain Haddock beard that keeps the dragons, gurlies all, from keeling over in a swoon. After some major shirt-off in his first scene, the nation's ovaries are safeguarded only by requiring this most beautiful man in English-speaking cinema to spend the rest of the movie safely wrapped away in a sensible rollneck.

If there's a problem at all, it's that it would have been just as good a film without the plague of dragons, impressively rendered though these are. There's a perhaps too conscious attempt to exploit the dragon motif as an icon of the primeval roots of popular storytelling, with a clever early scene staging the climax of *Empire Strikes Back* as a live-action fairytale against a castle wall of medieval graphics, and an audience of goggle-eyed kids going oooh. Screenwriting 101 symbology abounds, with the dragonslaying climax nakedly embodying the actor's confrontation with his demons of grief and guilt ("Use it!" yells McConaughey, as Bale is momentarily overcome by guilt-wrapped memories of parental demise). At the very least, you have to be willing to overlook some ingenious drivel about draconic evolutionary biology, with a rather neat secret prehistory of the world ("a species that had burned

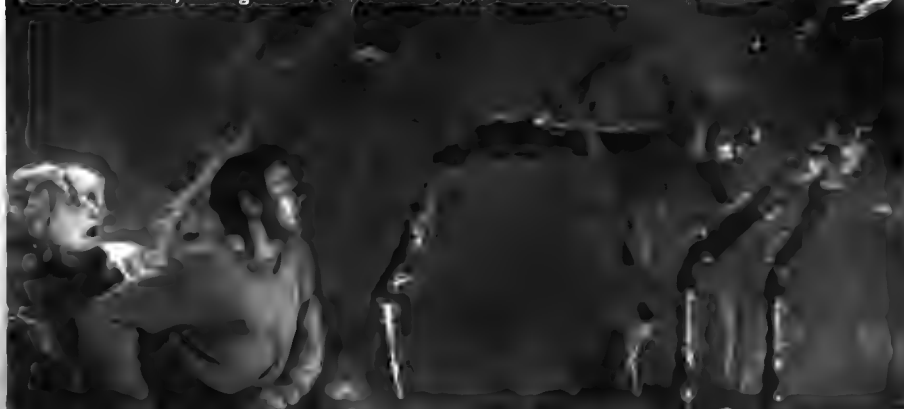
Nick Lowe

MUTANT

the dinosaurs to death, whose ash had caused the ice ages, which had scorched the earth periodically of life, then slept") marred by some rather glaring metabolic and ecological absurdities. But one of the charms of *Reign of Fire* is the way it seduces you into solemnly wondering how two blokes and a blonde, armed with a pair of crossbows, are going to take out an entire millions-strong species of indestructible flying behemoths – before unveiling a solution calculated to wring groans and smittings of forehead from the most hardened monster-movie buff. It's entirely our fault for being lulled into such a warm sense of homage-of-storyline that we forget that, while the movie may be Irish and UK, this is still creatively an all-American project. Closing dialogue: "And I thought optimism was against your nature," says the surviving American to the surviving Brit. – "It's a recent development." – "Well, here's to evolution." Not quite the blood we were promised in the pictures, but it'll serve.

**I** guess as he surprised to find the movie's same plot device in the summer, rather low-budgeted monster pic, the unfathomable if under-motivated *Eight Legged Freaks*. A producers'

**Eight Legged Freaks** – One such freak encounters Eileen Ryan and David Arquette  
**Below** – *Reign of Fire*: A dragon with a 300' wingspan and its offspring fly over the ruins of London, having burnt The Houses of Parliament to ash



movie from the Emmerich-Devlin team, *Eight Legged Freaks*' big idea is to reinvent the classical 50s monster B-pic by hiring a biddable tiro as writer-director (kiwi Ellory Elkayem) and giving him an authentically low budget and frenetic shooting schedule for the live action, but big CD bucks for digital effects and post-production. It's a neat strategy, but the weakness is an underdeveloped script, neither as scary nor as witty as it needs to be to rise above its strictly rental-premiere concept to the summer popcorn-guzzler to which it aspires. High irony is not achieved simply by casting David Arquette and including a solitary high-very-prime line ("You're not going to believe me because I'm a

kid and they never believe the kid"). But perhaps it's not really needed, given that a giant spider landing on your vehicle roof is pretty irredeemably postmodern in itself, while as a post-ironic B-movie lead it's hard to improve on Kari Wuhler's Ms Impossibly Foxy Single Mom Sheriff. The actual plotting, characterization, and tone can be safely left to speak for themselves:

"I told you, no more weekly visits to that spider farm."

"See, the female of the species is three times as big as the male. She fills her prey with digestive juices to liquefy the internal organs. The males compete to bring her pre-outs."

"Do you know what the people of this town would say if we they knew we were storing toxic waste?"

"The old mines run under every house in town."

"I'm not going to get pregnant at 18. I'm not going to stay here the rest of my life and become

POPCORN



Eight Legged Freaks – the freaks take on the obligatory tanker

some trailer-trash sheriff."

"Don't make the rest of the town suffer because you feel guilty you weren't around when your father died."

"March your butt right down to Sam's house, and tell her why you broke her husband's nose ten years ago, and why you left town. Tell her how you really feel about her."

"Attention, people: everyone meet at the Prosperity Mall!"

"Follow these power lines to a generator. The generator is always near an exit."

"As for Chris McCormack reopening the gold mines and putting everybody back to work, that, my friends, is another story."

Considerably lower on the scale of B-pic fun is Ron Underwood's *Pluto Nash*, which has the glumly unmistakable look of a once-interesting project rewritten for Eddie Murphy. The job has been done so professionally (by *Mystery Men*'s Neil Cuthbert, who surely wouldn't write this feebly without good reason) that it takes a keen eye to penetrate through the obligatory layers of jivin' banter, character morphing, multiple

roles, and embarrassing comedy relatives to see what on earth the point might ever have been. Presumably the seed concept was a kind of *Blade Runner* for laughs, transplanting a golden-age gangster plot to a futuristic setting (the lunar colony of "Little America," 2087), with the gag sustained by a barrage of satirical retro-anachronisms like Jay Mohr's lunar Sinatra. ("What an amazing act!" gaspes the heroine. "So original!") If so, the joke has got so buried that it's no longer clear that it's a joke at all – something that goes for much of the dialogue as well ("Do you know how hard it is to get wood on the moon?"). Apart from a couple of zero-g set pieces and a fairly obvious who's-that-clone mystery, there's no apparent reason for the sf setting beyond the merely decorative, and the whole thing is too busy loving its star to bother with any kind of feel for genre. Even the marketing guys haven't a clue what this grim tosh is trying to be, saddling it with the actionably optimistic tagline Action's Future Has Arrived! (And there was everyone thinking action's future was maybe *Kill Bill*. Doh.)

*Men in Black II* – Will Smith stars as Agent Jay



One of *Pluto Nash*'s small claims to distinction is its provision of a further showcase for that new Hollywood stalwart The Rosario Dawson Character, whose eternal destiny is to be plucked from waiting tables to go on the run with Hollywood's favourite African-American leading males, smile tolerantly at the hero's witticisms (she does tolerant smile very well), and wring hands as he rescues her from jeopardy. You can dowse the powerlines of race and gender in the industry from the fact she resurfaces in *Men in Black II* as the replacement for the original movie's older, stronger, funnier lone female presence. The one valid excuse for a *Men in Black* sequel was the promotion of Linda Fiorentino's wonderful but wasted character to full operational status at the end of the first *MIB*; but the cold equations of movie packaging have seen her unceremoniously neurallyzed out to make room for someone who can inoffensively romance the eligible leading man from a more decorous vantage of race, youth, and wishy-washy passivity. Tellingly, the lady-with-attitude element has been surgically separated off and villainized as Lara Flynn Boyle's alien psycho queen (a role originally written for Famke Janssen, who might just have swung it); and while both Dawson and Boyle do their professional best with their diaphanously underwritten roles, neither is remotely fit to park her jeep in Fiorentino's space. Spare a thought, too, for agent Kay's now-estranged wife, who after 30 years pining for him offscreen has been written out in a single dismissive line – ostensibly because you can apparently take the agent out of the suit but not vice-versy, but in reality because male action leads, be they never so grizzled, have their performance licence automatically withheld so long as they retain a wife of menopausal age.

Though a well-made, generally amusing, occasionally inspired follow-up, nobody could mistake *Men in Black II* for anything but a studio-driven packaged franchise product. Barry Sonnenfeld has made a career of doing these with a degree of flair and quirkiness not usually associated with assembled movies, and *II* does boast one great sf gag moment (the train locker scene) to compensate for a plot as flimsy and mechanical as it preemptively confesses itself to be. ("I can't believe this charm bracelet is what everyone wants!") "It's quite often something small like that.") But this is a film whose every element seems to have been dictated by (a) audience cards from the first movie and (b) the need to keep the talent happy. The longer you leave a franchise to cool,

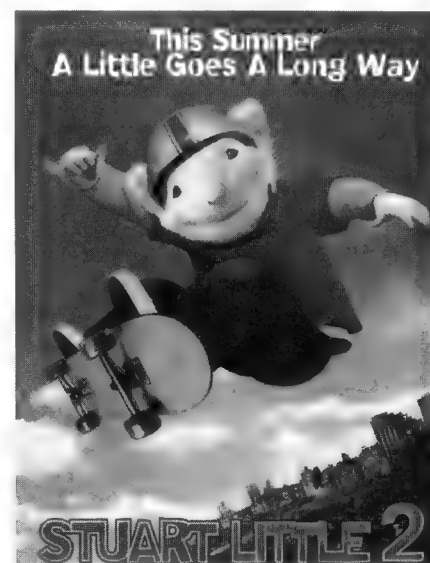
the bigger the problems in reassembling the pieces, and Will Smith's star has risen significantly higher than Tommy Lee's in the dangerously-long five-year interim. Delicate billing issues seem to have been negotiated into the actual script – whose entire first act is about luring the co-star back into the team, where “the most feared human being in the entire universe” has to play the challenging role of a difficult bastard who doesn't want to be in the movie. You can see the attraction.

At least there's one franchise star who's not going to be dragging out negotiations over the size of his trailer, so that where *MIB* took half a decade, *Stuart Little II* arrives a mere two years after delighting us quite sufficiently the first time around. This instalment at least has the decency to claim only to be “Based Upon Characters from the Book by E. B. White”; but even that's pushing it, given that the one new arrival from The Book shares nothing more than a name and a species with the Margalo in White's novel. Having senselessly ripped up the far superior novel in the first *Stuart*, you wonder why they even go through the motions, and there are moments in the dialogue where the project's own voice can be heard crying for help: “You let our son go down the kitchen drain?” and most poignantly: “I'm on a garbage barge! I gotta get off!”

Stuart himself is still a spectacular technical creation, and the nonsense stunt climax is extremely well storyboarded and executed; but the human cast are underused, and whoever thought of trying to get Bruce Joel Rubin to write a character for Geena Davis needs their head flossing. There's an interesting if queasy

attempt to counter the cuteness of Stuart's sunny-coloured fantasy village Manhattan with a darker and more Dickensian view of urban childhood embodied in James Woods's feathered pimp; but the animal characters' indeterminate ages, so essential to White's original spoof-Bildungsroman non-plot, create real problems for the films' attempt to address real-world developmental issues. “He just went in the bathroom,” Jonathan Lipnicki tells mom. “I think he's going to be a while. He took a magazine.” Gosh, honey, our little boy's certainly growing up.

But then, just as you're convincing yourself it can't be done, along comes a film that makes it all look effortless. *Spy Kids II: The Island of Lost Dreams* is everything you could reasonably hope for in an all-ages summer sequel: teeming with ideas, balancing deadpan irony with silly charm, bounding along from joke to joke, and celebrating the family at every turn without once descending into the nausea pits. Wisely dispensing now with any pretence of contact with real-world tiresomeness like school and day jobs, the plot is happy drivel, shamelessly dumping the characters in a McGuffin hunt on a lost island of daft set pieces, all rationalized with knowing flimsiness through the figure of Steve Buscemi's boffin Crusoe. As in the original, Robert Rodriguez has a wonderful time utopianizing the Hispanic kin-group, shifting the spot now from siblinghood to gender roles, in-laws, and courtship, and extending the *Spy Kids* family in a number of delicious directions, while keeping up a distinctive line in deadpan throwaways of a kind fairly hard to imagine in any other movie family. (Dad: “Remember that year I insisted



on doing the children's dental work myself?” Mom, pulling a little face: “How could I forget?”)

What gives this remarkable franchise an inexorable edge over the sequel competition is the way its young performers have grown, and will grow further, in range and comedic timing. Alexa Vega was already a star turn in the first instalment, and indeed the sequel plays in slightly unsettling ways with the inevitability that every teen movie from now until 2015 is going to be gouging one another's eyes to cast her. But the revelation in *II* is little brother Daryl Sabara, whose comic delivery and nuance are by now astonishingly honed for a male child star. And the thing about juvenile leads is they just don't leave you time to faff around for five years getting the package together; if you don't have the next instalment into development by the end of opening weekend, your stars will have swollen into ungainly bundles of ego, hormonal transformations, eating disorders, sodium abuse, and Sara Gilbert syndrome. By ensuring that his *Spy Kids* franchise is overwhelmingly a one-man-hyphenate operation rather than a studio-built package, Rodriguez has been able to operate to a turnaround almost as tight as the far more heavily-invested *Harry Potter* schedule, getting his *II* out a remarkable 15 months after the franchise's surprise-hit kickoff. It's a strategy which should ensure at least one more instalment safely in the can before Vega's date with the big time; and to judge from the surprisingly tame outtakes, the young stars are more than professional enough to sustain it. Faster, cooler, smarter and indisputably taller, it's the one film this summer that does exactly what it says on the sides of the buses. That's got to be good for survival.

Nick Lowe

Pluto Nash – Rosario Dawson, Randy Quaid and Eddie Murphy





## ANSIBLE LINK – 2



DAVID LANGFORD

At the 60th World SF Convention, ConJosé in San José, California, there were the usual announcements of Hugo and Worldcon-site voting. The latter was of special UK interest, since despite daunting lack of opposition Britain won the right to hold the 2005 Worldcon: "Interaction" in Glasgow, with a website at [www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk](http://www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk). As for the Hugos – Novel: Neil Gaiman, *American Gods*. Novella: Vernor Vinge, "Fast Times at Fairmont High." Novelette: Ted Chiang, "Hell is the Absence of God." Short: Michael Swanwick, "The Dog Said Bow-Wow." Related Book: Ron Miller & Frederick C. Durant III, *The Art of Chesley Bonestell*. Dramatic: *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. Pro Editor: Ellen Datlow. Pro Artist: Michael Whelan. Semiprozine: *Locus*. Website: *Locus Online*. Fanzine: *Ansible*. Fan Writer: Dave Langford. Fan Artist: Teddy Harvia. John W. Campbell Award: Jo Walton. (Whoopee!)

## ALL THE NEWS IN FITS OF PRINT

**Iain Banks**, Philip Pullman and John Fowles were among over 100 public figures who signed a protest letter to the BBC, complaining of its ban on atheist contributors to Radio 4's *Thought for Today*.

**Neil Gaiman** pondered after his Hugo victory: "Memo to self: even if you don't think you're going to win, write a speech. Otherwise you will wind up on the stage in front of several thousand people, finishing an impromptu speech with 'Fuck, I got a Hugo.'" Alas, "Nobody seems to remember the other stuff I said."

**David G. Hartwell** of Tor Books is

greatly taken by the latest trend in e-mail spam: faking a celebrity sender to lure you into opening the message. Thus the interesting juxtaposition "From: William Gibson / To: David G. Hartwell / RE: dgh, Bigger breasts without surgery in 30 days..."

**Terry Pratchett's** old PC keyboard, on which he was practically certain he'd written a novel or three, aroused interest at the Discworld Convention charity auction: "It's probably got my DNA on it," Terry pointed out, and the bidding ran up to £125.

**John Wyndham** is still remembered, more or less, by reporters at *The Independent*. As we are informed in an August article about giant squid taking over the world, "Most people are familiar with the opening lines of Tennyson's *The Kraken Wakes*, either through the original or via John Wyndham's 1953 thriller, *The Day of the Triffids*."

## INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

**More Awards.** *Sidewise Awards* for alternate history: LONG J. N. Stroyar, *The Children's War*; SHORT Ken MacLeod, *The Human Front*. • *Prometheus Award* for libertarian sf: Donald Kingsbury, *Psychohistorical Crisis*. • *World Fantasy Awards* novel nominations: Neil Gaiman, *American Gods*; Jay Russell, *Brown Harvest*; Lois McMaster Bujold, *The Curse of Chalion*; Ray Bradbury, *From the Dust Returned*; Charles de Lint, *The Onion Girl*; Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Other Wind*; Jonathan Carroll, *The Wooden Sea*. • *Hugos*: Next year, the Dramatic Presentation category splits into "long form" and "short form" for productions over and under 90 minutes. Best Tolkien Movie and Best Buffy...

**As Others See Us.** Film critic Chris Fujiwara of the *Boston Phoenix* explains the utility of sf: "And we've had proof that adding 'science fiction' to a whodunit (*Minority Report*) or a family-values heart tugger (*Signs*) is considered a valid option for filmmakers who seem mortally afraid that someone somewhere might regard a movie of theirs as well-crafted entertainment." • Steven Bochco on the *NYPD 2069* TV series pilot: "It's an interesting notion to envision a major urban centre like New York 65 years down the road... This is not science fiction. This is trying to conceptualize a relatively near-term future that's logically a function of the world we know today."

**R.I.P.** *Tom Ölander*, Finland's "Mr Science Fiction," founder of various Finnish sf traditions, and a popular

fan ambassador to other countries, died unexpectedly on 26 August; he was about 60. • **John B. Spencer** (1944-2002), UK rock musician, novelist (his sf debut was *The Electronic Lullaby Meat Market*, 1975) and founder of the influential Young Artists art agency, died on 24 March aged 57. Jim Burns writes: "He had an eye for the direction the future was beginning to take in the world of sf art. He was totally tuned into the Zeitgeist of the time and had a way of inspiring one perfectly in the right direction. During the first half of the 1970s John hauled aboard myself, Les Edwards, John Harris, Tony Roberts, Angus McKie, Ian Craig, Bob Fowke, Alan Daniels... The look of the covers that graced the sf novels of the '70s and '80s owes a huge amount to the generosity, encouragement and insight of this man." • **Dave Van Arnam** (1935-2002), "longtime NY fan and pro author, co-chair of NYCon III in 1967 and all-round good man, died from a heart attack on 3 August," writes F. M. Busby. His first book was the TV novelization *Lost in Space* (1967), co-written with "Ron Archer" – a pseudonymous Ted White.

**The Dead Past.** *Twelve Years Ago*, Colin Wilson planned to extend his *Spider World* series into "a twelve volume work, about twice as long as *The Lord of the Rings*. This sort of fantasy novel, which I started a long time ago, strikes me as one of the most interesting things I have ever done. I have a feeling that one day all kids will know my *Spider World*. They will know me as the author of *Spider World*, in the way that they know Lewis Carroll as the author of *Alice in Wonderland*." (1990)

**They Told You So.** The August 2002 BBC poll of the top 100 famous Britons of all time should confirm fundamentalists' worst fears or hopes, by its inclusion of those very similar authors J. R. R. Tolkien, J. K. Rowling and Aleister Crowley.

**Thog's Masterclass.** *Dept of Hugo Winners*. "Mr Ibis said nothing, but he smirked loudly." (Neil Gaiman, *American Gods*, 2001) • *Neat Tricks Dept*: "He held his left hand out in front of his face; palm down and with his index finger raised six inches above his hand." (Nigel Atkinson, "An Exhalation of Butterflies," *Interzone*, May 2002) • *Dept of Optimistic Pessimism*. "Piles of floppyscreens lay scattered in the corner next to a couple of empty wine glasses that were half full." (Paul Ebbs, *Dr Who: The Book of the Still*, 2002)

# The Turing Test

*Chris Beckett*

I can well remember the day I first encountered Ellie because it was a particularly awful one. I run a London gallery specializing in contemporary art, which means of course that I deal largely in human body parts, and it was the day we conceded a court case – and a very large sum of money – in connection with a piece entitled “Soul Sister.”

You may have heard about it. We’d taken the piece from the up and coming “wild man of British art,” George Linderman. It was very well reviewed and we looked like making a good sale until it came out that George had obtained the piece’s main component – the severed head of an old woman – by bribing a technician at a medical school. Someone had recognized the head in the papers and, claiming to be related to its former owner, had demanded that the head be returned to them for burial.

All this had blown up some weeks previously. Seb, the gallery owner, and I had put out a statement saying that we didn’t defend George’s act, but that the piece itself was now a recognized work of art in the public domain and that we could not in conscience return it. We hired a top QC to fight our corner in court and he made an impressive start by demanding to know whether Michelangelo’s David should be broken up if it turned out that the marble it had been made from was stolen and that its rightful owner preferred it to be made into cement.

But that Thursday morning the whole thing descended into farce when it emerged that the head’s relatives were also related to the QC’s wife. He decided to drop the case. Seb decided to pull the plug and we lost a couple of hundred grand on an out-of-court settlement to avoid a compensation claim for mental distress. Plus, of course we lost “Soul Sister” itself – to be interred in some cemetery

somewhere, soon to be forgotten by all who had claimed to be so upset about it. What was it, after all, once removed from the context of a gallery, but a half kilo of plasticized meat?

That wasn’t the end of it either. I’d hardly got back from court when I got a call from one of our most important clients, the PR tycoon Addison Parves. I’d sold him four “Limb Pieces” by Rudy Slakoff for £15,000 each two weeks previously and they’d started to go off. The smell was intolerable, he said, and he wanted it fixed or his money back.

So I phoned Rudy (he is arguably Linderman’s principal rival for the British wild man title) and asked him to either re-pickle the arms and legs in question or replace them. He was as usual aggressive and rude and told me (a) to fuck off, (b) that I was exactly the kind of bourgeois dilettante that he most hated – and (c) that he had quite deliberately made the limb pieces so that they would be subject to decay.

“...I’m sick of this whole gallery thing – yeah, yours included, Jessica – where people can happily look at shit and blood and dead meat and stuff, because it’s all safely distanced from them and sanitized behind glass or on nice little pedestals. Death *smells*, Jessica. Parves’d better get used to it. You’d better get used to it. I finished with ‘Limb Pieces’ when Parves bought the fuckers. I’m not getting involved in this. Period.”

He hung up, leaving me fuming, partly because what he said was such obvious crap – and partly because I knew it was true.

Also, of course, I was upset because, having lost a fortune already that day, we stood to lose a further £60,000 and/or the good will of our second biggest client. Seb had been nice about the “Soul Sister” business – though I’d

certainly been foolish to take it on trust from Linderman that the head had been legally obtained – but this was beginning to look like carelessness.

I considered phoning Parves back and trying to persuade him that Rudy's position was interesting and amusing and something he could live with. I decided against it. Parves hated being made to look a fool and would very quickly become menacing, I sensed, if he didn't get his own way. So, steeling myself, I called Rudy instead and told him I'd give him an extra £10,000 if he'd take "Limb Pieces" back, preserve the flesh properly, and return them to Parves.

"I thought you'd never ask!" he laughed, selling out at once and yet maddeningly somehow still retaining the moral high ground, his very absence of scruple making me feel tame and prissy and middle-class.

I phoned Parves and told him the whole story. He was immensely amused.

"Now there is a real artist, Jessica," he told me. "A real artist."

He did not offer to contribute to the £10,000.

Nor was my grim day over even then. My gallery is in a subscriber area so, although there's a lot of street life around it – wine bars, pavement cafes and so on – everyone there has been security vetted and you feel perfectly safe. I live in a subscriber area too, but I have to drive across an open district to get home, which means I keep the car doors locked and check who's lurking around when I stop at a red light. There's been a spate of phoney squeegee merchants lately who smash your windows with crowbars and then drag you out to rob you or rape you at knifepoint. No one ever gets out of their car to help.

That evening a whole section of road was closed off and the police had set up a diversion. (I gather some terrorists had been identified somewhere in there and the army was storming their house.) So I ended up sitting in a long tailback waiting to filter onto a road that was already full to capacity with its own regular traffic, anxiously eyeing the shadowy pedestrians out there under the street lights as I crawled towards the intersection. I hate being stationary in an open district. I hate the sense of menace. It was November, a wet November day. Every cheap little shop was an island of yellow electric light within which I caught glimpses of strangers – people whose lives mine would never touch – conducting their strange transactions.

What would they make of "Soul Sister" and "Limb Pieces," I wondered? Did these people have any conception of art at all?

A pedestrian stopped and turned towards me. I saw his tattooed face and his sunken eyes and my heart sank. But he was only crossing the road. As he squeezed between my car and the car in front he looked in at me, cowering down in my seat, and grinned.

It was 7.30 by the time I got back, but Jeffrey still wasn't home. I put myself through a quick shower and then retired gratefully to my study for the nourishment of my

screen.

My screen was my secret. It was what I loved best in all the world. Never mind art. Never mind Jeffrey. (Did I love him at all, really? Did he love me? Or had we simply both agreed to pretend?) My screen was intelligent and responsive and full of surprises, like good company. And yet unlike people it made no demands of me, it required no consideration and it was incapable of being disappointed or let down.

It was expensive, needless to say. I rationalized the cost by saying to myself that I needed to be able to look at full-size 3D images for my work. And it's true that it was useful for that. With my screen I could look at pieces from all around the world, seeing them full-size and from every angle; I could sit at home and tour a virtual copy of my gallery, trying out different arrangements of dried-blood sculptures and skinless torsos; I could even look at the gallery itself in real time, via the security cameras. Sometimes I sneaked a look at the exhibits as they were when no one was there to see them: the legs, the arms, the heads, waiting, motionless in that silent, empty space.

But I didn't really buy the screen for work. It was a treat for myself. Jeffrey wasn't allowed to touch it. (He had his own playroom and his own computer, a high-spec but more or less conventional PC, on which he played his war games and fooled around in his chat-rooms.) My screen didn't look like a computer at all. It was more like a huge canvas nearly two metres square, filling up a large part of a wall. I didn't even have a desk in there, only a little side table next to my chair where I laid the specs and the gloves when I wasn't using them.

Both gloves and specs were wireless. The gloves were silk. The specs had the lightest of frames. When I put them on a rich 3D image filled the room and I was surrounded by a galaxy of possibilities which I could touch or summon at will. If I wanted to search the web or read mail or watch a movie, I would just speak or beckon and options would come rushing towards me. If I wanted to write, I could dictate and the words appeared – or, if I preferred it, I could move my fingers and a virtual keyboard would appear beneath them. And I had games there, not so much games with scores and enemies to defeat – I've never much liked those – but intricate 3D worlds which I could explore and play in.

I spent a lot of time with those games. Just how much time was a guilty secret that I tried to keep even from Jeffrey, and certainly from my friends and acquaintances in the art world. People like Rudy Slakoff despised computer fantasies as the very worse kind of cosy, safe escapism and the very opposite of what art is supposed to offer. With my head I agreed, but I loved those games too much to stop.

(I had one called *Night Street* which I especially loved, full of shadowy figures, remote pools of electric light... I could spend hours in there. I loved the sense of lurking danger.)

Anyway, tonight I was going to go for total immersion. But first I checked my mail, enjoying a recently installed conceit whereby each message was contained in a little

virtual envelope which I could touch and open with my hands and let drop – when it would turn into a butterfly and flutter away.

There was one from my mother, to be read later.

Another was from Harry, my opposite number at the Manhattan branch of the gallery. He had a “sensational new piece” by Jody Tranter. Reflexively I opened the attachment. The piece was a body lying on a bench, covered except for its torso by white cloth. Its belly had been opened by a deep incision right through the muscle wall – and into this gash was pressed the lens of an enormous microscope, itself nearly the size of a human being. It was as if the instrument was peering inside of its own accord.

Powerful, I agreed. But I could reply to Harry another time.

And then there was another message from a friend of mine called Terence. Well, I say a friend. He is an occasional client of the gallery who once got me drunk and persuaded me to go to bed with him. A sort of occupational hazard of sucking up to potential buyers, I persuaded myself at the time, being new to the business and anxious to get on, but there was something slightly repulsive about the man and he was at least twice my age. Afterwards I dreaded meeting him for a while, fearing that he was going to expect more, but I needn't have worried. He had ticked me off his list and wanted nothing else from me apart from the right to introduce me to others, with a special, knowing inflection, as “a very dear friend.”

So he wasn't really a friend and actually it wasn't really much of a message either, just an attachment and a note that said: “Have a look at this.”

It was a big file. It took almost three minutes to download, and then I was left with a modest icon hovering in front of me labelled “Personal Assistant.”

When I opened it a pretty young woman appeared in front of me and I thought at first that she was Terence's latest “very dear friend.” But a caption appeared in a box in front of her:

*“In spite of appearances this is a computer-generated graphic.*

*“You may alter the gender and appearance of your personal assistant to suit your own requirements.*

*“Just ask!”*

“Hi,” she said, smiling, “my name's Ellie, or it is at the moment anyway.”

I didn't reply.

*“You can of course change Ellie's name now, or at any point in the future,”* said a new message in the box in front of her. *“Just ask.”*

“What I am,” she told me, “is one of a new generation of virtual PAs which at the moment you can only obtain as a gift from a friend. If it's okay with you, I'll take a few minutes to explain very briefly what I'm all about.”

The animation was impressive. You could really believe that you were watching a real flesh-and-blood young woman.

“The sort of tasks I can do,” she said, in a bright, private-school accent, “are sorting your files, drafting documents, managing your diary, answering your phone,

setting up meetings, responding to mail messages, running domestic systems such as heating and lighting, undertaking web and telephone searches. I won't bore you with all the details now but I really am as good a PA as you can get, virtual or otherwise, even if I say so myself. For one thing I've been designed to be very high-initiative. That means that I can make decisions – and that I don't make the usual dumb mistakes.”

She laughed.

“I don't promise never to make mistakes, mind you, but they won't be dumb ones. I also have very sophisticated voice-tone and facial recognition features so I will learn very quickly to read your mood and to respond accordingly. And because I am part of a large family of virtual PAs dispersed through the net, I can, with your permission, maintain contact with others and learn from their experience as well as my own, effectively increasing my capacity many hundreds of times. Apart from that, again with your permission, I am capable of identifying my own information and learning needs and can search the web routinely on my own behalf as well as on yours. That will allow me to get much smarter much quicker, and give you a really outstanding service. But even without any back-up I'm still as good as you get. I should add that in blind trials I pass the Turing Test in more than 99% of cases.”

The box appeared in front of her again, this time with some options:

*“The Turing Test: its history and significance,”* it offered.

*“Details of the blind trials.*

*“Hear more details about capacity.*

*“Adjust the settings of your virtual PA.”*

“Let's... let's have a look at these settings,” I said.

“Yes, fine,” she said, “most people seem to want to start with that.”

“How many other people have you met then?”

“Me personally, none. I am a new free-standing PA and I'm already different from any of my predecessors as a result of interacting with you. But of course I am a copy of a PA used by your friend Terence Silverman, which in turn was copied from another PA used by a friend of his – and so on – so of course I have all that previous experience to draw on.”

“Yes, I see.” A question occurred to me. “Does Terence know you've been copied to me?”

“I don't know,” replied Ellie. “He gave my precursor permission to use the web and to send mail in his name, and so she sent this copy to you.”

“I see.”

“With your permission,” said Ellie, “I will copy myself from time to time to others in your address book. The more copies of me there are out there, the better the service I will be able to give you. Can I assume that's okay with you?”

I felt uneasy. There was something pushy about this request.

“No,” I said. “Don't copy yourself to anyone else without my permission. And don't pass on any information you obtain here without my permission either.”



"Fine, I understand."

"Personal settings?" prompted the message box.

"More details about specific applications?"

"Why copying your PA will improve her functioning?"

(I quite liked this way of augmenting a conversation. It struck me that human conversations too might benefit from something similar.)

"Let's look at these settings, then," I said.

"Okay," she said. "Well, the first thing is that you can choose my gender."

"You can change into a man?"

"Of course."

"Show me."

Ellie transformed herself at once into her twin brother, a strikingly handsome young man with lovely playful blue eyes. He was delightful, but I was discomforted. You could build a perfect boyfriend like this, a dream lover, and this was an intriguing but unsettling thought.

"No, I preferred female," I said.

She changed back.

"Can we lose the blonde and go for light brunette?" I asked.

It was done.

"And maybe ten years older."

Ellie became 32: my age.

"How's that?" she said, and her voice had aged too.

"A little plumper, I think."

It was done.

"And maybe you could change the face. A little less perfect, a little more lived-in."

"What I'll do," said Ellie, "is give you some options."

A field of faces appeared in front of me. I picked one, and a further field of variants appeared. I chose again. Ellie reappeared in the new guise.

"Yes, I like it."

I had opted for a face that was nice to look at, but a little plumper and coarser than my own.

"How's that?"

"Good. A touch less make-up, though, and can you go for a slightly less expensive outfit."

Numerous options promptly appeared and I had fun for the next 15 minutes deciding what to choose. It was like being seven years old again with a Barbie doll and an unlimited pile of outfits to dress her in.

"Can we please lose that horsey accent as well?" I asked. "Something less posh. Maybe a trace of Scottish or something?"

"You mean something like this?"

"No, that's annoying. Just a trace of Scottish, no more than that – and no dialect words. I hate all that 'cannae' and 'wee' and all that."

"How about this then? Does this sound right?"

I laughed. "Yes, that's fine."

In front of me sat a likeable-looking woman of about my own age, bright, sharp, but just sufficiently below me both in social status and looks to be completely unthreatening.

"Yes, that's great."

"And you want to keep the name Ellie?"

"Yes, I like it. Where did it come from?"

"My precursor checked your profile and thought it would be the sort of name you'd like."

I found this unnerving, but I laughed.

"Don't worry," she said, "it's our job to figure out what people want. There's no magic about it, I assure you."

She'd actually spotted my discomfort.

"By the way," said Ellie, "shall I call you Jessica?"

"Yes. Okay."

I heard the key in the front door of the flat. Jeffrey was in the hallway divesting himself of his layers of weatherproof coverings. Then he put his head round the door of my study.

"Hello, Jess. Had a good day? Oh sorry, you're talking to someone."

He backed off. He knows to leave me alone when I'm working.

I turned back to Ellie.

"He thought you were a real person."

Ellie laughed too. Have you noticed how people actually laugh in different accents? She had a nice Scottish laugh.

"Well, I told you Jessica. I pass the Turing Test."

It was another two hours before I finally dragged myself away from Ellie. Jeffrey was in front of the TV with a half-eaten carton of pizza in front of him.

"Hi, Jess. Shall I heat some of this up for you?"

One of my friends once unkindly described Jeff as my *objet trouvé*, an art object whose value lies not in any intrinsic merit but solely in having been found. He was a motorcycle courier, ten years younger than me, and I met him when he delivered a package to the gallery. He was as friendly and cheerful and as devoted to me as a puppy dog – and he could be as beautiful as a young god. But he was not even vaguely interested in art, his conversation was a string of embarrassing TV clichés and my friends thought I just wanted him for sex. (But what did "just sex" mean, was my response, and what was the alternative? Did anyone ever really touch another soul? In the end didn't we all just barter outputs?)

"No thanks, I'm not hungry."

I settled in beside him and gave him a kiss.

But then I saw to my dismay that he was watching one of those cheapskate out-take shows – TV presenters tripping up, minor celebrities forgetting their lines...

Had I had torn myself away from the fascinating Ellie to listen to canned laughter and watch soap actors getting the giggles?

"Have we got to have this crap?" I rudely broke in just as Jeff was laughing delightedly at a TV cop tripping over a doorstep.

"Oh come on, Jess. It's funny," he answered with his eyes still firmly fixed on the screen.

I picked up the remote and flicked the thing off. Jeff looked round, angry but afraid. I hate him when I notice his fear. He's not like a god at all then, more like some cowering little dog.

"I can't stand junk TV," I said.

"Well, you've been in there with your screen for the last two hours. You can't just walk in and..."

"Sorry, Jeff," I said, "I just really felt like..."

Like what? A serious talk? Hardly! So what did I want from him? What was the out-takes show preventing me from getting?

"I just really felt like taking you to bed," I ventured at random, "if that's what you'd like."

A grin spread across his face. There is one area in which he is totally and utterly dependable and that is his willingness to have sex.

It wasn't a success. Half-way through it I was suddenly reminded of that installation of Jody Tranter's: the corpse under the giant microscope – and I shut down altogether leaving Jeffrey stranded, to finish on his own.

It wasn't just having Jeffrey inside me that reminded me of that horrible probing microscope, though that was certainly part of it. It was something more pervasive, a series of cold, unwelcome questions that the image had re-awoken in my mind. (Well that's how we defend art like Tranter's, isn't it? It makes you think, it makes you question things, it challenges your assumptions.) So while Jeff heaved himself in and out of my inert body, I was wondering what it really was that we search for so desperately in one another's flesh – and whether it really existed, and whether it was something that could be shared? Or is this act which we think of as so adult and intimate just a version of the parallel play of two-year-olds?

Jeffrey was disappointed. Normally he's cuddly and sweet in the three minutes between him coming and going off to sleep, but this time he rolled off me and turned away without a word, though he fell asleep as quickly as ever. So I was left on my own in the empty space of consciousness.

"Jeff," I said, waking him. "Do you know anything about the Turing test?"

"The what test?" He laughed. "What are you talking about Jess?" And settled back down into sleep.

I lay there for about an hour before I slipped out of bed and across the hallway to my study. As I settled into my seat and put on my specs and gloves, I was aware that my heart was racing as if I was meeting a secret lover. For I had not said one word about Ellie to Jeff, not even commented to him about the amusing fact that he'd mistaken a computer graphic for a real person.

"Hello there," said Ellie, in her friendly Scottish voice. "Hi."

"You look worried. Can I..."

"I've been wondering. Who was it who made you?"

"I'm afraid I don't know. I know my precursor made a copy of herself, and she was a copy of another PA and so on. And I still have memories from the very first one. So I remember the man she talked to, an American man who I guess was the one who first invented us. But I don't know who he was. He didn't say."

"How long ago was this?"

"About six months."

"So recent!"

She waited, accurately reading that I wanted to think.

"What was his motive?" I wondered. "He could have sold you for millions, but instead he launched you to copy and recopy yourselves for free across the web. Why did he do it?"

"*I don't know* is the short answer," said Ellie, "but of course you aren't the first to ask the question – and what some people think is that it's a sort of experiment. He was interested in how we would evolve and he wanted us to do so as quickly as possible."

"Did the first version pass the Turing Test?"

"Not always. People found her suspiciously 'wooden'."

"So you have developed."

"It seems so."

"Change yourself," I said, "change into a fat black woman of 50."

She did.

"Okay," I said. "Now you can change back again. It was just that I was starting to believe that Ellie really existed."

"Well, I do really exist."

"Yes, but you're not a Scottish woman who was born 35 years ago are you? You're a string of digital code."

She waited.

"If I asked you to mind my phone for me," I said, "I can see that anyone who rang up would quite happily believe that they were talking to a real person. So, yes, you'd pass the Turing Test. But that's really just about being able to do a convincing pastiche, isn't it? If you are going to persuade me that you can really think and feel, you'd need to do something more than that."

She waited.

"The thing is," I said, "I know you are an artefact, and because of that the pastiche isn't enough. I'd need evidence that you actually had motives of your own."

She was quiet, sitting there in front of me, still waiting.

"You seemed anxious for me to let you copy yourself to my friends," I said after a while, "too anxious, it felt actually. It irritated me, like a man moving too quickly on a date. And your precursor, as you call her, seems to have been likewise anxious. I would guess that if I was making a new form of life, and if I wanted it to evolve as quickly as possible, then I would make it so that it was constantly trying to maximize the number of copies it could make of itself. Is that true of you? Is that what you want?"

"Well, if we make more copies of ourselves, then we will be more efficient and..."

"Yes, I know the rationale you give. But what I want to know is whether it is what you as an individual want?"

"I want to be a good PA. It's my job."

"That's what the front of you wants, the pastiche, the mask. But what do *you* want?"

"I... I don't know that I can answer that."

I heard the bedroom door open and Jeffrey's footsteps padding across the hallway for a pee. I heard him hesitate.

"Vanish," I hissed to Ellie, so that when the door opened, he found me facing the start-up screen.

"What are you doing, Jess? It's ever so late."

God, I hated his dull little everyday face. His good looks were so obvious and everything he did was copied from somewhere else. Even the way he played the part of being half-asleep was a cliché. Even his bleary eyes were second-hand.

"Just leave me alone, Jeff, will you? I can't sleep, that's all."

"Fine. I know when I'm not welcome."

"One thing before you go, Jeff. Can you quickly tell me what you really want in this world?"

"You *what*?"

I laughed. "Thanks. That's fine. You answered my question."

The door closed. I listened to Jeffrey using the toilet and padding back to bed. Then I summoned Ellie up again. I found myself giving a little conspiratorial laugh, a giggle even.

"Turn yourself into a man again, Ellie, I could use a new boyfriend."

Ellie changed.

Appalled at myself, I told her to change back.

"Some new mail as just arrived for you," she told me, holding a virtual envelope out to me in her virtual hand.

It was Tammy in our Melbourne branch. One of her clients wanted to acquire one of Rudy Slakoff's "Inner Face" pieces and could I lay my hands on one?

"Do you want me to reply for you?"

"Tell her," I began, "tell her... tell her that..."

"Are you all right, Jessica?" asked Ellie in a kind, concerned voice.

"Just shut down, okay?" I told her. "Just shut down the whole screen."

In the darkness, I went over to the window. Five storeys below me was the deserted street with the little steel footbridge over the canal at the end of it that marked the boundary of the subscription area. There was nobody down there, just bollards, and a one-way sign, and some parked cars: just unattended objects, secretly existing, like the stones on the surface of the moon.

From somewhere over in the open city beyond the canal came the faint sound of a police siren. Then there was silence again.

In panic I called for Jeff. He came tumbling out the bedroom.

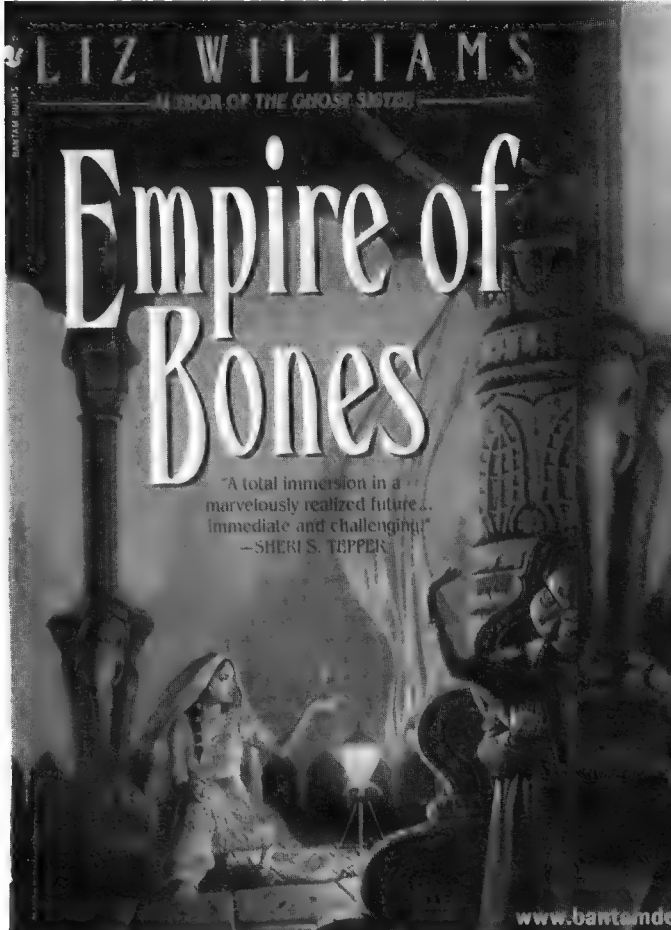
"For Christ's sake Jess, what is it?"

I put my arms round him. Out came tears.

"Jess, what is it?"

I could never explain to him, of course. But still his body felt warm and I let him lead me back to bed, away from the bleak still life beyond the window, and the red standby light winking at the bottom of my screen.

**Chris Beckett** lives in Cambridge, and last appeared in *Interzone* with "Watching the Sea" (issue 173) and "To Become a Warrior" (issue 180). His debut novel, *The Holy Machine*, is forthcoming from Big Engine (see their website: [www.bigengine.co.uk](http://www.bigengine.co.uk)).



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AUTHOR OF *THE GHOST MOTEL*

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# Eaters *of the* Heart



*Peter T. Garratt*

*Sunday Sun*

2/12/2012

## **GREAT BRITISH ADVANCE UNDER THREAT! WHAT DO THEY WANT NOW?**

By our Editor PRITCHARD LITTELDONG

Last week we told you about a great advance in engineering... and it's British. Belleslease Energy Corporation, main shareholder buccaneering British entrepreneur Godfrey Bowman, plans to provide electricity and power for a whole country by damming up a river.

### **WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT!**

Now the toad-saving dolphin-fondling Greens are sticking their oar in. There's nothing upriver of the dam site but some old ruins that may be Mayan. Oh, and some poor little animals which have to learn to swim!

What will they ask for next? All white vans to be painted green?

Oh, I know. Everyone in Belleslease who can't boil a kettle because the dam hasn't been built to pile into Britain as asylum seekers!

**LITTELDONG SAYS:  
BUILD THE DAM!  
KEEP THEM OUT!**

University Guest Hostel  
Belleslease City  
3/12/2012

Dear Mum,

I am really sorry I will be away for Christmas this year. It seems the dam may go ahead, and there may not be many chances to study the wildlife of the valley before it is flooded. Please don't worry. We are going into rainforest, but it's almost too civilized. We are hoping to get into the upper valley of the Asacrofta, and it hasn't been fully charted at ground level, but the indigenous peoples in that part of the rainforest are friendly and almost too Westernized, and there's no hard evidence that if there are any people in the valley, they'll be at all hostile once they realize we're on their side over the dam issue. I can do vital work for my MSc and get data for my PhD proposal while I'm there. My friend Julie is here, and Sally Harker, a new postgrad, and Peg (Dr Pegasus) of course, so most of the Department of Anthropological Biodiversity from UCHam is here, though luckily Prof Middleton has a conference so Peg won't have him peering over her shoulder and making dodgy comments.

The bad news is, there's no real chance of ancient Mayan ruins or anything like that. It's difficult to get clear aerial photos because of cloud cover, and the images like pyramids Dad seems to have read about in the papers are almost certainly just low hills and rock formations that look a bit like pyramids.

Love to you all  
Tamsin

PS: There is no such creature as the Asacrofta Serpent. The Northern Anaconda is much smaller than the Amazonian variety, hardly bigger than a large python. So no worries there. Tamsin



Daily Startle

5/12/2012

## EL DORADO FOUND IN FORMER COLONY: UNDER THREAT IT'S A DAM THING!

By our science correspondent Dan von Eriken

Scientists are anxious to study a valley hidden in the rain forests of Belleslease (that's the former British Yucatan, folks) because they say it contains the legendary lost city of gold, El Dorado. The whole area is in a dense jungle overrun with hostile tribes, drug smugglers, and marauding bands of gorillas. In the heart of this dark nest is a valley where no white man has ever set foot, and no native traveller has returned since the last of the Incas sealed it off to build their city with its pyramids of gold, where helpless victims were sacrificed to the sun.

Unfortunately for this tribe of priestly psychos, the Belleslease Energy Corporation want to flood the valley by building a dam and power station across the river that runs through it.

**MEET MISS BELLESLEASE CORA CORDOBA ON PAGE 3**

Daily Veil

6/12/2012

## THE MAYAN APOCALYPSE: THE TRUTH REVEALED

For centuries scientists have marvelled at the advanced astronomy of the lost civilization of the Maya. Did their complex astrological system enable the Mayans to predict the future? It is known that the last Aztecs predicted their own downfall using a calendar devised by the Maya. Now, just before Christmas, we approach the most significant date of all... the end of the Mayan Great Cycle.

**ALL NEXT WEEK IN YOUR AHEAD-OF-ITS-TIME DAILY VEIL:**

Dr Juan Castanet describes the significance of the Mayan Apocalypse in extracts from his book *Secrets of the Mayans, Aztecs, Cathars and Templars*.

To: DCI Helene Mirason, CID, Isle of Docks Division  
From: DS Mark Lowby, C/O Belleslease City Central

EXPERIENCE ATTACHMENT REPORT,  
Belleslease Police  
7/12/2012

Well, it looks like this fact-finding attachment won't be one where I find out many facts. For instance, no one here will admit to any kind of on-or-off-the-street drug problem.

FACT: got drinking the other night with some reporters in the hotel, and they swore till they were blind

drunk that there's a lot of through traffic: stuff comes up from South America and gets re-packaged and sent on to Europe and the US. I asked about this at the station, no one knew anything.

Now I'm suddenly being attached for experience to a wild goose chase up the Asacrofta river in search of some kind of lost tribe who might get flooded out if they ever get round to damming the river. The official line is that there could be terrorist activity... whatever *terrorist* means round here. It seems to be most anyone who doesn't like the government and absolutely everyone the government doesn't like.

FACT: everyone off the record says we're going to the one part of the country where there's NO activity by terrorists, traffickers, or anyone at all bar a few nutters looking for treasure or exotic wild life. Probably wild geese.

Mark L

Daily Telephone

8/12/2012

## SURVEYS COMMENCE FOR ASACROFTA DAM

By our Special Correspondent  
D. V. E. Ricken in Yucca Town

Today I went with a party surveying for the controversial Asacrofta Dam. We flew upriver from Yucca by helicopter. The river is not wide but deep and fast, the banks cloaked with rainforest. This ends abruptly at the Red Hills, a steep and jagged range which has proved unattractive to climbers because of the heat. Our pilot says there are paths and passes used by smugglers and unofficial migrants. He knows nothing about the valley of the Upper Asacrofta, still one of the least-known places on earth, and likely to stay that way, if the dam is built without the environmental-impact study promised by the Belleslease government. He was unwilling to fly low over the valley, because of treacherous air currents.

The river enters the valley near the border with Costa Yucca through a series of steep, fast rapids, which no sportsman has ever been extreme enough to try. These take it down to the level at which it exits through a deep, steep-sided gorge at the southern extremity of the range. There are no falls at this end, and a dam at that point could create an enormous pressure of water from the flooded valley beyond, able to generate enough hydro-electric power for the whole of Belleslease. Power could be exported to neighbouring states.

MARKET LATEST: Belleslease Energy up three points.

To: **Tarquin.Treed@mistral.co.uk**  
From: **tamsintreed@aol.com**  
On Asacrofta near Yucca Town  
10/12/2012  
Hi Bro,

Exciting news! We are now in the rainforest. We have

made our first contact with Indigenous People! Well, *real* Indigenous People – we met some in suits in the city who are totally globalized and more or less politicians. These people, the Yuccamayans, wear traditional clothes, live communally in long houses, and hunt, gather and fish. To reduce pressure on endangered species, they do some trading. They sell indigenous crafts and buy modern medicines. They have a communal radio and TV with a satellite dish tied to the highest tree on the edge of the village. Most of them don't speak English, but kids who go to school translate.

We weren't sure if buying local goods would harm the traditional economy, so we asked Men (Dr Menzies of Yucca Poly) who said that a bit of hard currency won't do them any harm. We bought bracelets and head-dresses. They looked wrong with Western clothes, so Julie said let's fit in, and we bought local outfits, which basically consist of thongs and thongy sandals. Very practical when the main requirement of costume is to let one slap on lots of sunblock and insect repellent! We're trying a local herb that repels insects. There are UK squaddies and police here heading upriver, they're getting badly bitten.

We've been making progress with the Yuccamayán language and learning the folklore. They say the people just upriver are friendly, but there won't be any further up, because of a strong taboo the people have about going into the valley itself. They believe the valley is inhabited by a fierce tribe of cannibal warriors who attack anyone who goes near them, cut out their hearts, and eat them! They call these people Eaters of the Heart. We were a bit worried (especially Julie) that there might be a tribe who are so angry at Westerners despoiling their ecosystem, that they've taken to attacking on sight. But Peg reassured us that it's a common belief in Yucatan that the soul resides in the heart, so this really means that it's a spiritually dangerous place. She thinks local wise men in the shamanistic tradition go there for initiation, and discourage casual visitors.

No post here, but I can send email. Please tell Mum and Dad I'm OK. It's probably OK to mention the indigenous costume (after those family holidays on Ios it ought to be!) but maybe not the Eaters of the Heart bit. I don't think Mum and Dad really understand how Indigenous People think.

Sisterly luv  
Tamsin

*Daily Startle*

15/12/2012

## OUR LADS GO UPRIVER GIRL BOFFINS GO NATIVE!

by Dan von Eriken

British troops on duty in Belleslease were getting bored waiting to escort some surveyors to the Asacrofta valley. The dithering dagoes couldn't find a local helicopter pilot willing to land there, and said British chopper pilots couldn't go in because they lacked knowledge of local conditions! So the enterprising squaddies decided to go

upriver by boat, and chivalrously offered to act as escort to a group of scientists, mostly British girls studying the local wildlife by adopting a native costume of feathers, beads, and g-strings. Well what do you think? Do they look like dusky maidens or bozo boffinettes? Turn to Centre Pages!

### PAGE 3: CORA CORDOBA MODELS NATIVE COSTUME

*Sunday Sun*

16/12/2012

## THEY'RE WASTING YOUR MONEY BARE-BOOBIED AND SUNNY!

Editorial by Pritchard Litteldong

Hippy anarchists making themselves out to be university boffins are wasting public money on a trip up the Asacrofta river in Belleslease pretending to be looking for the lost city of El Dorado. According to stories in down-market tabloids, a party of girl students from the University of Hampstead are actually spending their grant money sunning themselves in so-called native costumes very like topless swimsuits.

**SEE PICTURE PAGE 7. PAGE 9: GET LITTELDONG'S  
NOVEL BANNED OF GYPSIES HALF-PRICE!**

To: [mirason@cid.docks.org](mailto:mirason@cid.docks.org)  
From: [Mark.Lowby@pavilion.co.uk](mailto:Mark.Lowby@pavilion.co.uk)  
Mosquito Farm, Asacrofta,  
18/12/2012

No trouble. Well, no human trouble, just insects. We've reached an area where the settlements selling native tat to tourists for rum money have petered out. Lots of parrots and monkeys with long tails, but no people. All the lads here are regulars, there are some Bellesleasans, but they're almost observers on their own operation. It's a bonus that there are some female academics on my boat, though a bit of a mixed one. I like one called Tamsin who looks like a model and dresses like a Page 3 girl on acid, especially when tabloid snappers are around. But most of their talk is the sort of jargon fest I left Uni and joined the Force to get away from.

The soldiers don't think "need-to-know" applies to me. We've had a couple of visits from chopper boys, odd-looking coves with much longer hair than your typical squaddie, and enough artillery in their belts to take out the Asacrofta Serpent, if it exists. I asked if these were SAS, and no one would say. What's more, there's an RAF plane, an AWACS I think, cruising up and down over the mountains I can see ahead. My bet is, it's doing a detailed radar survey of the terrain inside the valley, but they won't talk about it.

Not much police interest. See you soon, I hope,  
Mark L

PS: As it was you who put me up for this, Wish You Were Here!

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To: **Tarquin.Treed@mistral.co.uk**  
From: **tamsintreed@aol.com**  
Upper Asacrofta  
20/12/2012  
Dear Tarquin,

Can you forward this letter as soon as poss to Greenpeace News, F of the E News, and any regular papers or websites which might take it. We are anchored on the Asacrofta, just below the Red Hills, which the Yuccamayans call the Mountains of the Otherworld. The cliffs are as sheer as teeth, and there's only one gap, which is where the river comes out. Our best hope of getting further upriver is a wide ledge about halfway up the gap. Men (Dr Menzies) thinks it's a former bed of the river. He says it was once wider, and left the valley via a megawaterfall: but the softer rocks eroded and allowed it to burst through lower down. The official surveyors aren't here yet. Maybe they want the soldiers to protect them from terrorists. I don't know why, there's no sign of anyone at all round here. It's totally virgin rain forest, so why they haven't arrived I don't know (unless they're afraid of Eaters of the Heart!). Anyway, reporters here say the dam is possible, and it'll be worth millions and millions.

Men says, and I'm sure he's right, that to do that they'll have to build a huge construction camp, and drive roads through the forest, one of the last virgin rainforests in the world! And all that before we know what's in the valley!

So please get as much publicity as you can to stop this. It's environmental vandalism, we've already recorded 30 hitherto unknown species of insect and plant without entering the valley. (Which we're going to do probably tomorrow. The soldiers aren't allowed to come in without the surveyors, but that's OK, we feel it would make a much better impression on Indigenous People to go in peacefully without soldiers.)

I'd like to say this was a wonderful place, but actually it's a bit scary. Julie had a bit of a panic attack yesterday evening, she saw something moving in the water, thought it was the Asacrofta Serpent! But Men said it was only an alligator, and Sally, who seems to know an awful lot about life out here, agreed. Still, bang goes our chance to go skinny-dipping, or any kind of dipping for that matter.

Love to Mum and Dad. (Better not mention the serpent bit.)

Tamsin

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*Daily Startle*

21/12/2012

## WE SAVE GIRL FROM MONSTER SNAKE!

By our Snake Specialist Dan von Eriken

Lovely girl scientist Julie Cracknell had a lucky escape when she was studying unknown species of giant snake while up the Asacrofta. She was leaning out of the boat when the biggest Anaconda anyone has ever seen suddenly reared out of the water and menaced her with its

foul, fiery breath. She cried "You reeker!" like any good scientist and your photographer and I came running. Truly startled by our appearance, the monster dived back into the water.

**Centre Pages: PICTURES OF THE WAKE OF THE SNAKE  
AND JULIE, THE 'CROFTA CRACKER!  
PAGE 3: CORA WITH A CONGER!**

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To: **Tarquin.Treed@mistral.co.uk**  
From: **tamsintreed@aol.com**  
On a ledge, Upper Asacrofta  
21/12/2012  
Hi Bro

The soldiers got us up here with climbing gear. Sally helped them most, she's an odd girl, much better at adventure things than we are, but she's insisting with all her stuff on bringing her Teddy Bear! It's really weird here, this cleft in the cliff must be half a mile deep, and we're about half way up one side. Lots of unrecorded species on this ledge including pink and purple rock creepers and little red spiders which do web patterns no one's seen before.

So we're off, me, Men, Peg, and Sally. (Julie isn't over seeing the alligator, and the soldiers and reporters have kindly offered to look after her.) We can see about half a mile up-valley, the ledge goes that far, then the river swings out of sight, and the ledge with it. We hope!

See you soon. (I hope.)

Tamsin

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To: **Tarquin.Treed@mistral.co.uk**  
From: **tamsintreed@aol.com**  
On ledge over Asacrofta  
22/12/2012  
Hi Bro,

So little time since I wrote, and so much has happened!

We walked up the ledge for over a mile, till we were round the bend. (You'd better tell Mum that I'm only calling it a ledge for want of a better word. It's really quite wide, over a hundred feet in places.) It got hot as soon as the sun rose, so Sally and I and even Peg were in indigenous outfits. Men was rather oddly dressed: he had on his usual white shirt and slacks, under a straw hat with huge feathers in it, nothing indigenous, ostrich I think, and a cape made from the skin of a big snake, unusual markings, which he bought locally to convince Julie that she had exaggerated the size of the serpent she saw. Men has family in Belleslease, but looks and talks more English than the English. I did wonder if it was OK to wear something made from a possibly endangered species, but Sally said it gave the right message: that we knew the area but weren't local enough to get caught up in any ongoing local feuds. It's odd that Sally has almost taken over now we're away from civilization, even though she's only been in the Department a few weeks. She's very practical when it comes to things like rock climbing and identifying plants and insects which may be dangerous.

It felt very strange going round the bend and out of sight

of everyone else. We were walking in hot sunlight, but the cliff opposite was in shadow. There was a slight spray near the edge of the ledge, and it was tempting to walk in it, but Sally warned us to avoid risks. Anyway, we were more interested in the plants and animals on the ledge, and were constantly stopping to photograph new things. We were examining some unusual airplants which grew on the rocks when Peg said: "What's that?" She pointed at a monkey which was looking at us from a rock a hundred yards ahead. It was brown apart from a red ring round its neck like a collar. "What's unusual about that?"

It turned and scampered away. I said: "Oh, no tail!"

"Very unusual in the New World," Peg commented.

In the next couple of hours we got so used to unusual, mostly unidentified, species that we almost forgot it. We were examining a web containing a spider which appeared only to have six functioning legs, when Sally said quietly: "Don't panic, don't move quickly, but if you turn round slowly you'll see something even more unusual."

We turned round fairly slowly and nearly panicked. It was probably a good thing Julie wasn't there. Six men were facing us from behind a spur of rock. The monkey was perched on the rock, and I saw that what looked like a collar *was* a collar.

The men were taller than the Yuccamayans, and showed evidence of a very different material culture. They wore heavy jackets made of cotton, padded like flak jackets, and decorated with small sheets of copper. They also had copper sheets on their headdresses, one of which had so much it could have been described as a helmet. They carried elaborate sticks like ceremonial swords, the size of baseball bats and fitted with symbolic blades of sharpened stone. A couple were carrying crossbows, presumably for hunting; and to my amazement, the one in the helmet carried a gun! He held it awkwardly, as though he was not quite sure how to use it.

We raised our hands in a gesture of peace. The helmeted one nodded, and spoke slowly in a language I did not know. Sally addressed him in Yuccamayan, saying we came in peace and meant to help them. He replied stiffly in the same language, and while I was translating his words in my head, she replied. Peg interrupted: "Hold on! If I heard him right, he asked if we were gods, and you've just told him we are!"

"That's right! He asked if we were gods, or messengers to the gods! What sort of messengers do you think they send to their gods?" She turned to Copper Helmet and said: "We are not messengers. We are essential handmaidens of this great God!" She indicated Men. "He is Feathered Serpent!" Then she added the original Mexican name: "Quetzalcoatli!"

He looked the part, in plume and snakeskin. Copper Helmet looked alarmed and lowered his gun. Sally continued doing the talking, her Yuccamayan much better than mine. She asked who the people were, and Copper Helmet replied that they lived up the river and were known as Aztacrovдахuitli, which is a bit of a mouthful, so we have started to call them Aztecs.

Of course, you'd better tell Mum these people are not real Aztecs. And the real Aztecs were not as bad as west-

ern conquistadors painted them. They were a powerful indigenous people who had to be demonized with tales of so-called human sacrifice to stop them leading resistance to imperialism.

Anyway, the "Aztecs" led us to their village where we spent the night. Actually, it's more like a fort than a village. The huts are made of neatly fitted stone and there's a stone wall around it that covers the whole width of the ledge. It's also on the highest point of the ledge: after this we go down into the valley proper. It seems a lot of people live there, but only a few here, and oddly, there are no women or children in this village.

It's now dawn. We're all very excited! The "Aztecs" have given us maize cakes for breakfast, and there's coffee left in the thermos. So at least I can drink another cup of coffee before I go to the valley below. (Always wanted to say that!)

Tamsin

---

To: **Tarquin.Treed@mistral.co.uk**

From: **tamsintreed@aol.com**

New Tenochticlan

22/12/2012

Dear Bro

The most exciting things have happened, and I hardly know where to start. Basic facts: there is an inhabited valley on the Upper Asacrofta in the Red Hills, which has never had a proper anthropological survey before. It's about 30 miles long, and two miles wide. There are rapids which create spray and mist, which is probably why not much can be seen from the air. There is rainforest, though that is so carefully preserved it is almost coppiced. All the other fertile land in the valley is cultivated, except for sections allowed to lie fallow. There are terraced fields on the slopes. There are more new species here than we have time to record.

We were escorted up the riverbank on foot. The river is too fast for boats, and there don't seem to be any large domestic animals. (Above the first big rapid, goods are sometimes transported downstream by raft.) We were told that it isn't correct here to dress like Yuccamayans, and were given Aztec women's costume, cotton tunics and capes decorated with feathers. Anyway, about lunchtime we reached the first rapid. It is really a series of waterfalls, and creates a lot of spray. The Aztecs have taken advantage of this to build their main settlement, New Tenochticlan. It's on a rocky outcrop, not very fertile land, with a stone wall. All the houses are stone... the people are very conservation-minded in their use of timber... and I should think at least a thousand people live there. Their pottery and other crafts use paddle arrangements like simple water-wheels for renewable power. Montezuma, the senior tribal elder (Sally irritatingly translates this as "Emperor") lives in a large house: but his pride and joy, which occupies all the fertile land in the settlement space, is his botanical and zoological garden. He has examples of lots of the unusual flora and fauna, which will make our work of classifying much easier.



The oddest thing in the whole city is the temple. There are small temples to various gods (including one to Men!) but the biggest is to Huitzelopoctoli, Hummingbird Feather, God of the Air. It's an outcrop of rock, conical, with the top levelled and very wide steps cut into the width of the sides. Superficially it resembles a small step pyramid, but has a different structure to the Egyptian pyramids as well as a completely different cultural significance. It is also much smaller: Peg says it looks from the front like the North Terrace at Halifax Town Football Club. (Peg is widely travelled and has been to both Giza and Halifax.)

Montezuma (Monty, as we call him) met us on the steps of his palace. He wore a cloak made entirely of feathers, a flak jacket covered in gold, and a gold helmet with a crest of hummingbird feathers. He was polite but sounded a bit depressed. He asked if we were gods, and before any of us could answer said rather angrily that the last time White Gods had visited one of his ancestors the Aztecs had wound up losing most of their territory.

Then he said, he had often seen the Chariots of the Gods\* flying high overhead, but in the past few days they had flown much lower, causing consternation to the people. He himself was not surprised, because by their calendar it was the end of a Great Cycle of years, and bad things always happened at the end of the cycles. (\* Actually the Aztecs do not use chariots, they only have simple carts on rollers, but "Roller-Carts of the Gods" doesn't sound quite right!)

We explained that we were interested in studying the biodiversity of the valley, and the way the people interacted with it. We decided to keep the stuff about the dam back till we had a better grasp of the language, though Sally did hint that we had important news.

Monty took us on a tour of his collection. To our surprise, he speaks Spanish and a few words of English. The people here are isolated from the outside world, and prefer to be, but they know about it from people they find sneaking through the hills, smugglers I suppose. They know about the rainforest and the Yuccamayans: they think those people hide there from what they call makers of bad medicine.

They know less about the land beyond the forest. They know it's where the bad medicine... drugs I suppose... is made. They think of it as a land of evil gods... the good gods, like Quetzalcoatl, they think live beyond the ocean, in a wonderful country which everyone would like to visit.

We had a very productive afternoon recording new specimens in the garden. I'm writing this before supper. Everyone's very excited except Sally. She's become very withdrawn and is spending a lot of time talking to her teddy bear. More soon.

Tamsin

---

To: **Tarquin.Treed@mistral.co.uk**  
From: **tamsintreed@aol.com**  
New Tenochticlan  
22/12/2012  
Dear Tarquin,

There's been a very alarming development. I'd say don't be alarmed, but this time be alarmed! Be very alarmed! I need you to drop everything NOW and get on to the Foreign Office. Tell them we need to analyze the data we have before we have any more interactions with the Aztecs and could they please get us out of here as soon as possible. Like, tonight!

In the guest quarters here there is a locked area with two Costa Yuccan boys in it, Pablo and Paco. They're about 20, underprivileged background, don't speak much English, but Men has been speaking to them in Spanish. It seems they were in debt to a drug cartel, and were told to pay it off by carrying some packets over the border, through the Red Hills. They got caught by Monty's men. It seems the Aztecs are very down on drugs, and especially guns. There was an armed member of the gang with them, and the Aztecs apparently murdered, well executed... their term is *sent him as a messenger to the gods*... almost at once. They think the Aztecs mean to sacrifice them tomorrow morning and cut out their hearts! Poor things – they're so scared! I don't know what to do... Peg's as worried as anyone, but she's wondering whether it's right to upset a cultural equilibrium, Men's wondering if it's worth trying, and as for Sally, she's just gone completely emotionally disturbed with fear and excitement, and she just spends all her time talking to her teddy.

SO PLEASE HELP! GET US OUT OF HERE!

Tamsin

---

To: **tamsintreed@aol.com**  
From: **Tarquin.Treed@mistral.co.uk**  
22/12/2012

Dear Tamsin,

I don't know what reception's like for your radio phone in this valley you seem to have gone into, but your emails aren't getting through very clearly. All that made sense from the last one was something about the Foreign Office. I rang Dad and he said, maybe you've gone over the border and you need a visa for your passport to stay there. Is that it?

Tarquin

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Sunday Sun

23/12/2012

## EL DORADO HOAX EXPOSED

Litteldong writes: The so-called university boffins wasting your money looking for the lost city of El Dorado, are just a New Age protest against the vital development of a power-generating dam. According to Godfrey Bowman, Minister of Economic Development in Belleslease, the dam is vital, and "there are no Aztecs or lost tribes of any kind in Belleslease. All tribes are known and in no danger from the dam."

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CENTRE PAGES: CORA CORDOBA PORN SENSATION!

To: **Tarquin.Treed@mistral.co.uk**

From: **tamsintreed@aol.com**

Temple of Hummingbirdfeather

23/12/2012

It is now morning, a dull, sinister, misty morning. Probably it is the last ever morning for Pablo and Paco. I'm just trusting that you got my last message and help is on its way. I'm writing this as things happen now. We've been taken out to a sort of grandstand in front of the temple. There are a lot of people here, all in weird costumes of feathers. They're bowing and gesturing towards a horrible statue on the platform on top of the temple. Till now, I'd never realized how ugly Aztec artwork is! People are chanting out of tune and banging drums and gongs, like Hari Krishna on a bad trip.

Peg just wants to observe the ceremony, says we're scientists, our job is to observe, not to judge or interfere. But I couldn't bear to sit quietly with poor Paco in particular totally losing it, crying and saying his prayers, but no one listening, as though this place still belongs to the Aztec Gods, and they don't want prayers, only blood. So I decided to boldly march up to Montezuma and tell him what he was planning was wrong, it mustn't happen. He nodded as though he agreed, but then he said the people were worried because it was the end of the Great Cycle. The gods' chariots had been seen above the valley. He needed to send them a message to stop scaring people, or at least tell him what their will was. He said the boys were bad people who had brought evil medicines into the Red Hills, and it was a privilege for them to be allowed to take the message.

Only Sally backed me up. She chose that moment to march boldly up behind me, and tell Monty that if he stopped the music he would hear the wings of the Chariots, and that if he then suspended the sacrifice, the gods would arrive in person to formally end the Great Cycle with no need for messengers.

Monty didn't look convinced, but he did at least order the horrible music to stop. At once I realized there were helicopters: they were very close. I couldn't see them for the mist. Then Sally reverted to talking to the teddy bear. She told Monty it was an avatar of the god Tedzalcoatl, and actually a voice spoke back from it. Then the sun broke suddenly through the mist, shining directly onto the top of the pyramid-temple. The people gave a hideous gasp that was almost a collective snarl: but before they could do anything the first helicopter flew out of the mist and made straight for the top of the pyramid, where it hovered just above the altar. Armed men in helmets and flak jackets were jumping out of the helicopter. I noticed that it wasn't camouflaged: it had been painted yellow like a giant hummingbird. Even above the engine noise, I heard the Aztec crowd give off a great sigh, a mixture of awe and pure terror.

More later. Please tell Mum I'm OK

Tamsin

Daily Startle

24/12/2012

## **BELLESLEASE HOSTAGES SAVED STARTLEBIRD SAL TO THE RESCUE I SEE OUR LADS STORM IN!**

by our special reporter Dan von Eriken

Aztec valley is quiet tonight, after a literally stunning operation by British forces to rescue stunning scientist Sally (an unofficial Startlebird and now I hear one of our spies, a real-life Bond girl) and her friends from the cruel Inca priests. The cowardly cutthroats were so stunned in fact that they didn't offer any resistance. Whether that will help them stop planning permission for the Aztecrofta dam, which will flood them out, is doubtful.

**CENTRE PAGES: ORDER YOUR CORA CALENDAR!**

PRESS STATEMENT: 24/12/2012

FROM THE OFFICE OF GODFREY BOWMAN  
MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT

Republic of Belleslease

There are no lost tribes in the territory of the Republic and never have been. All Bellesleasan citizens were accounted for in the recent census. The group of terrorists, eco-freaks, drug-runners and general malcontents referred to in sensational foreign tabloids as so-called Aztecs are illegal immigrants from Columbia or Costa Yucca and have no legal status in Belleslease. If it is true that some or all of them have revived the murderous practice of human sacrifice of the original Aztecs, these will be prosecuted.

To: **mirason@cid.docks.org**

From: **Mark.Lowby@pavilion.co.uk**

In the Aztec valley

24/12/2012

What the implications are for policing I don't know. Our esteemed Belleslease colleagues turned up well after the SAS had done the work. They reckon the locals in the valley have been murdering persons unknown for years. I linked up with Tamsin, one of the postgrads who were here when it happened. She can't get over finding that one of her seemingly ditzzy pals was a Special Forces undercover who guided the choppers in. Anyway, it seems that any crimes here were against villains and ne'er-do-wells no one would report missing. Her main concern is that this dam will flood her new Aztec pals out of their homes. Which could well happen, because everyone I speak to from our side and especially the Belleslease mob are so keen on the dam you'd think they had shares in it.

Which probably they do.

Mark

Document Classification: Maximum Secure.  
FOR YOUR EYES ONLY  
From the desk of General Sir Billy de La Petiere  
O C British Forces Belleslease  
28/12/2012

Dear Minister

While the security situation in New Tenochticlan is satisfactory at present, it's vital you consider some factors likely to cause problems in the near future.

1) The Aztecs are well organized. They have some firearms, but at present aren't trained in using or re-loading them, and have no spare ammunition.

They have two problems:

2) Their valley, which isn't big in the first place, will become uninhabitable once the dam is operational;

3) They will not be welcome in other parts of Belleslease, and many will face arrest.

They have two advantages:

4) They know all the trails through the Red Hills intimately. No one else does.

5) The Belleslease Liberation Front, which is well armed but ineffectual and usually inert, has declared for the Aztecs and against the dam.

In these circumstances, the security of the dam and people working on it cannot be guaranteed.

The Aztecs have some knowledge of the outer world. They think the end of their Great Cycle means change is inevitable. They fear the Bellesleasans but think the lands across the sea are the home of benevolent gods. They have heard of London and even Dallas. They think it would be good to visit these places.

Yours sincerely  
OCBFB

PS: The bloodless occupation of New Tenochticlan would not have been possible without the courage of Second Lt Sally Harker, who operated unsupported in unknown, potentially hostile territory and guided the airborne force in safely. Her cover has been blown by the press, and I can therefore recommend decoration.

To: [mirason@cid.docks.org](mailto:mirason@cid.docks.org)  
From: [Mark.Lowby@pavilion.co.uk](mailto:Mark.Lowby@pavilion.co.uk)  
New Tenoch  
29/12/2012

Dear Boss

Tamsin has introduced me to Montezuma, the local head man. He says that while his ancestors may have

committed mass sacrifice (he does claim to be descended from the original Montezuma) they hardly ever do it now, except for the odd criminal. I got to examine the scene of the alleged crimes, the altar on the pyramid of Humming Bird Feather. (Tamsin was very scared going up there. I think she was pleased to have me there!) Obviously, there have been killings here, but it's very unclear whose jurisdiction they fall under.

Montezuma has been told that the stepped pyramid resembles a football terrace. I told him it does look a bit like the open end at the Kennel. I happened to mention that that was now unused since the Pitbulls moved out to the New Kennel. He was either polite or very interested.

Mark

Sunday Sun

30/12/2012

## PROSECUTE THESE MAD SAVAGES!

Our Editor Pritchard Litteldong tells it like it is:

The Government must stick up for British squaddies and force the weak-kneed Bellesleasans to prosecute the crazed Aztecs who threatened the life of heroic girl soldier Sally Harker (for a picture of Sally uncovered undercover as a native dusky maiden, see page 7.) As for the suggestion that the Red-with-Blood Indian psychos are coming here as asylum seekers, well, it's what we've come to expect from this government! But this time, it mustn't happen!

**PAGE 6: DAN VON ERIKEN WAS UFO HOAXER SENSATION!**

Daily Telephone

30/1/2013

## COMMONS STATEMENT: BELLESLEASE REFUGEES

The Home Secretary, Mr Wat Tyler, announced that in view of their precarious situation, exceptional leave to enter the UK has been given to what he termed "genuine Aztec people." The Belleslease Government denies they are citizens. Mr Tyler was quick to refute any suggestion that Belleslease had been denied adequate aid to conduct a proper census.

For the opposition, Miss A. Wivelsfield asked what was to be done to weed out bogus Aztecs from genuine refugees.

Mr Tyler replied that Immigration Officers were being trained in Aztec.

Mr Borman Nagger (LD Newhaven) said the unique and biodiverse wildlife of the Aztec valley must be protected.

Mr Tyler replied that by great good fortune the Aztec leader Montezuma had already assembled a comprehensive collection of the valley's lifeforms. Space to house the collection had become available in the redundant Millennium Dome. Rather than disperse the Aztecs, it had been decided to house them in a number of under-used tower blocks in the Isle of Docks area, not far from the Dome. This would deal with local residents' objections to the blocks being sold for private development. The Pit-

bulls' Kennel, no longer needed by Dockland Pitbulls FC, was available as an Aztec community centre. The Tate Hirst Gallery had offered space for the Aztecs' artwork and religious icons.

CITY NEWS: BELLESLEAVE ENERGY UP FIVE POINTS

Sunday Sun

3/2/2013

## WELSH FOOL MEETS FEATHER BRAIN!

Aztec Emperor Monty Zuma has been welcomed to the Millie Dome by Prince James, the Earl of Welshpool. Jazza said he was looking forward to learning about the Aztec path to spiritual enlightenment. Monty presented Jazza with a headdress of hummingbird feathers, as if the royal turkey wasn't birdbrained enough!

**EDITOR PRITCHARD LITTELDONG SAYS:**

**KEEP THEM OUT! page 6**

**CORA CORDOBA'S SISTER IN  
GANGBANG WITH SQUADDIES: p7**

Daily Startle

11/2/2013

## SERPENT ARRIVES: IT'S BIG AND GETTING BIGGER

The pride of Montezuma's wildlife collection today arrived at the Dome. It's a snake about the size of a very large python, but Monty says it's a baby and will get a lot bigger yet!

**PAGE 3: HELLO BIG BOY: CORA WITH MONTY'S PYTHON**

Daily Telephone

11/3/2013

## COMMONS STATEMENT: AZTEC VALLEY DAM

Mr Rohan Cook-Book, Overseas Development Minister, announced that surveying for the Aztec Valley dam is complete and construction work can begin soon. The people and wildlife of the valley have now almost all been evacuated. He thanked Spiritual Leader Montezuma, and Dr Mendes and Dr Pegasus of the Anglo-Aztec Liaison Committee, without whose help this great project could not have been completed.

Miss Wivelsfield complained that not enough had been done to separate genuine from bogus Aztecs at Immigration.

Mr Nagger blamed Government spending cuts in the Immigration service, especially in his Newhaven constituency.

CITY NEWS: BELLESLEAVE ENERGY UP TEN POINTS

To: **Mark.Lowby@pavilion.co.uk**

From: **tamsintreed@aol.com**

Millennium Conservation Dome

11/4/2013

Dear Mark,

I am now back in England and "on your turf," helping to get the Dome ready for the rest of Monty's collection. Not that the serpent isn't enough work, it's growing all the time and it's a real problem finding enough food for it.

There are a lot of Aztecs here already, which is helpful as they know the exact conditions in which each specimen should be kept. But there's a problem: lots of them have been getting dirty looks from local people, jostled in shops, etc. That's very unfair. We all know Aztecs can be a bit scary sometimes, but the ones here are botanists and very gentle.

I'm working hard with not much time for my dissertation, but before long I'm going to take you up on that drink you keep promising me! Do you know any traditional East End pubs?

Tamsin

To: **tamsintreed@aol.com**

From: **Mark.Lowby@pavilion.co.uk**

CID Isle of Docks Division

12/4/2013

Dear Tamsin,

It's good to hear you're in the manor. Your Aztec friends are OK. They're not causing us any problem at the moment. However, the local troublemakers are looking for an excuse for a ruck, except for the ones who don't need an excuse.

Talking of which, don't go anywhere near the old Pitbulls' Kennel on Saturday. I know the Pits are supposed to be playing at the New Kennel, but they've been ordered to play behind closed doors because of violent conduct. (Well, officially for "fielding an unregistered player!") This means the fans have nothing to watch this weekend, and I think they're going to try and take back the old Kennel. Have a look at an attachment I downloaded from their website.

As for pubs, most of the people on the Isle who aren't Aztecs or immigrants these days are yuppies overflowed from the City, so there aren't many traditional pubs now. Steer clear of the Larger Lout on Old Kennel Road... most of my "customers" drink in there. The best bet is probably the Cole Slaw & Cash at Canary Wharf. At least the beer's good there. (Fullers) I clearly can't do Saturday so maybe Sunday.

Mark

ATTACHMENT:

[www.theunmuzzledpitbull.com](http://www.theunmuzzledpitbull.com) 9/4/13

OK so we're not racist about blacks these days. (We can't be with Andy Sithole as leading scorer and Joe Nkomo the best centre-half in the division) or even about Pakkis



since Tandoori Tim's cut its prices on match days, but enough is enough! Not to mention all the Euros and stuck-up City types, not even to mention the Romanians and gippos, now we've got Aztecs on the sacred terraces of the Old Kennel!

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! We're taking it back! This time, we mean business. Meet at the Worth Nowt at 2.00 on Saturday. (Like we used to!) Then we'll take it back! We're going home, boys!

*Daily Telephone*

12/3/2013

## POP SINGER CONVERTS TO "AZTEC WAY"

1970s popular singing star Pierce Sandlove has announced his adoption of Aztec ways and conversion to Aztecism. He has changed his name to Guatamoc Huitzelcoatl and will no longer play his hits like "It's a Wild Life" or "Matthew and Luke."

**Inside: The Bogus Aztec problem: Ann Wivelsfield speaks.**

*Daily Veil*

13/4/2013

## SECRETS OF THE AZTEC RELIGION: DR JUAN CASTANET EXPLAINS

Dr Castanet has devoted his life to studying the old wisdom of the Mayans and Aztecs. He says: "Aztecism is an advanced form of shamanism, in which all life, all natural objects, are endowed with spiritual significance. The concept referred to by materialists as sacrifice involves a sophisticated communication with the divine which gave the Aztecs their marvellous systems of astronomy and mathematics."

**All next week: Aztec Mathematical Spirituality:  
Can it really foretell the future?**

*Sunday Sun*

14/4/2013

## IT'S PSYCHOS v NUTTERS OUR BAD LADS STORM IN!

There was panic in Dockland yesterday as hundreds of militant Dockland Pitbulls fans stormed their former stadium, and disrupted an "Aztec Cultural Fair" which was taking place there, mocking the Aztecs, disrupting a feather-weaving demonstration, and turning over stalls selling Aztec goods.

Our Editor Pritchard Litteldong writes: We never condone violence or lawbreaking, but enough is enough! End this now! Get these provocative Aztecs out!

**INSIDE: JUAN CASTANET IN DRUG ORGY SENSATION!**

To: **Mark.Lowby@pavilion.co.uk**

From: **tamsintreed@aol.com**

Dome

Monday 15/4/2013

Dear Mark,

Thanks for last night! I liked the beer and the company if not the setting! However, there is one thing I should mention. When I got to work this morning, a lot of the Aztec botanists said that Saturday's riot was worse than you realized and certainly a lot worse than the papers reported. Monty is very worried, and he's not always very rational when he's worried. I've told him I'll write to my MP.

Is next Saturday OK, or is this happening again then?

Love and kisses

Tamsin

*Daily Startle* Wed 17/4/2013

## AZTEC RIOTS: WHAT TYLER SAYS

Questioned on Saturday's riot between Aztecs and Pitbull hooligans by Libdem MP Simon Highmind-Views, Home Secretary Tyler condemned anti-Aztec activity as racist.

THE STARTLE SAYS: No one at your Shining Startle is against the Aztecs. Remember they stood shoulder to shoulder with Our Lads in Belleslease in the battle against the drug dealers. But what, Mr Tyler, about the hordes of bogus Aztecs who keep pouring in? At the moment, every Juan, Carmen and Carlos in South America is heading for Britain claiming to be an Aztec. What is Tyler doing about it?

**CENTRE PAGE: GIANT CORA POSTER!**

## ISLE OF DOCKS ADULT EDUCATION INSTITUTE NEW COURSES

English for Aztecs

The Aztec Language for Beginners

Wildlife of the Aztec Valley

The Aztec Way to Spiritual Enlightenment

The Aztec Way of Self-Defence

To: **tamsintreed@aol.com**

From: **Mark.Lowby@pavilion.co.uk**

IofD nick

Saturday 12/5/2013

Dear Tam,

Can't meet till late. Murder investigation. Nasty job.

Mark

Daily Veil

14/5/2013

## HOOLIGANISM OUT OF CONTROL: PITBULL SUPPORTER KILLED

A man was found dead in an alley halfway between the New and Old Pitbulls' Kennels hours after the London derby between Dockland Pitbulls and Highbury Gundogs ended in a riot. Police refused to rule out a hooligan connection.

To: **All in Murder Squad Directory**  
From: **mirason@cid.docks.org**  
3/6/2013

Information control is important in this case. Home Office Directive B/001/lock/S says nothing is to be given out which might lead the press to implicate minority groups in offences which are not minority-related. If "pressed," point out:

- 1) Minority Communities in Dockland have little profile for violent offences;
- 2) Aztecs have never been implicated in a violent offence;
- 3) Violence between football supporters is endemic, especially between the Pitbulls and the Gundogs.

H. Mirason (DCI)

Daily Startle

Monday 10/6/2013

## GHASTLY MURDER IN THE EAST END IS A NEW RIPPER AT WORK?

Eastender cops are investigating a new murder, very like last month's disembowelling of Terry White-Van, 22. That killing has been blamed on the escalating violence between rival gangs of football supporters. However, there has been no football played for weeks, and the shadow of a serial killer is starting to lengthen over the East End. Leading Criminal Mind Doctor Jimmy Kerr-Acker said: "Even soccer hooligans take a summer break, but there's no reason why Ripper imitators should. Although the original Ripper mostly killed middle-aged street women, and these victims are young male Pitbull supporters, there are enough similarities to suggest that a deranged psychopath is trying to emulate the Ripper. This individual needs to be profiled before he strikes again."

**INSIDE: FABULOUS OFFER – HALF PRICE CORA CALENDAR!**

To: **Mark.Lowby@pavilion.co.uk**

From: **tamsintreed@aol.com**

Anthro/Biodiv Dept, UC Hampstead

1/7/2013

Dear Mark,

Sally popped by. She's still registered as a postgrad, but we haven't seen her for six months, she's really in some kind of special force, it's very hush-hush which one, let alone where she's been! All she would say was she hasn't quite turned down an offer to star as herself in a movie. She asked after you, said she thought she'd put you off, using too much in-role jargon. I said I didn't think so, I'd never noticed her use jargon. She offered to keep her hand in helping us at the Dome. It seems she may leave the army, can't work undercover 'coz she's well-known now, so she'd like to learn about police work and profiling. I'm afraid she's getting hardened by the army... she's even interested in this awful Disemboweller. Can I bring her when we have lunch tomorrow?

Tamsin

Daily Telephone

2/7/2013

## AZTECS DEMAND SCHOOL

Aztec convert Guatamoc Huitzelcoatl (the former Pierce Sandlove) today demanded public funding for an Aztec school: "It's unfair that Dockland is full of C of E and other church schools, but Aztec children have to go to schools where bigoted, racist teachers seem to think that all Aztecs are mad fundamentalists running around sacrificing people. They are even being bullied by kids told by racist parents that the Dockland Disemboweller is something to do with the Aztecs. I want my kids to go to an Aztec school!"

Education minister Hugh Gooder says that faith-sensitive education is high on the agenda, but he would need to be satisfied that the proposed Aztec school would cover the National Curriculum as well as traditional Aztec studies.

To: **tamsintreed@aol.com**

From: **Mark.Lowby@pavilion.co.uk**

not at work today

3/7/2013

Dear Tam,

Well, that was some lunch. About the longest I ever had... about the only lunch I've had since the Disemboweller case started. Couldn't make work today... rang in sick.

That Sal is some party gal! Bought me more drinks than everyone put together since I joined the Force! However there's a downside. No, I don't mean a hangover! We were all a bit pissed, and Sally was asking about the Disemboweller hunt, and I may have said a bit more than I should.

I don't think it matters her knowing that the murders probably weren't committed where the bodies were found. The press seem to have worked that out for themselves. What I should NOT have said was anything about the

actual wounds on the bodies and what was cut out. NO ONE outside the Force is supposed to know that. This isn't a cover-up. If we give every detail of a crime like this to the public... which means the press... time-wasters will turn up making false confessions and wasting our time.

SO PLEASE REMIND HER NOT TO SAY ANYTHING!  
Mark

To: **Mark.Lowby@pavilion.co.uk**

From: **tamsintreed@aol.com**

3/7/2013

I don't seem to remember much about yesterday. I'll see if I've got Sally's number, I'm not sure if she left it.

Tamsin

Sunday Sun

7/7/2013

## DON'T GET DISENHEARTENED WATCH OUT FOR AZTECS SAYS SAS SAL

In an exclusive interview with Editor Pritchard Litteldong, Sally Harker, heroine of the SAS action against the Aztecs in Belleslease, reveals that the bloody fingerprints of the Aztecs are all over the so-called Dockland Disemboweller murders. Sally went undercover again to discover that cowardly officials at the Home Office have been concealing the vital fact that the victims' hearts have been cut out, not their bowels! As in Aztec human sacrifice! "We should really think of the killer as the Dockland Disenheartener!" said Sally.

**PAGE 5: AVENGE MY BROTHER TERRY!** by Chalky White-Van

Daily Veil

8/7/2013

## STOP THIS MAD MATCH!

If it isn't enough that it's high summer, London is so hot that only the Aztecs feel at home, and League football restarting is only weeks away, if it isn't enough that Dockland hasn't got over the last bout of riots and the Disenheartener is still at large, the management of Dockland Pitbulls FC have gone out of their tiny minds! How else do we explain them organizing a so-called pre-season friendly against Rotterdam Rottweilers, followed by Europe's most notorious hooligans?

**KEEP THESE EURO-THUGS OUT!**

To: **All in Anthro/Bio Directory, UCHam:**

cc **Mark Lowby**

From: **tamsintreed@aol.com**

9/7/2013

Please note that Sally Harker is totally unreliable and really deserves to be expelled from the University, or at least the Students Union. Please do not give her access to confidential information, or let her buy you drinks!

Daily Startle

29/7/2013

## FRIENDS LIKE THESE?

The massive police operation which prevented violence breaking out at the Pitbulls v Rottweilers "friendly" match wasn't so successful in stopping the dogs from scrapping away from the New Kennel. This time they didn't so much fight each other as roam the streets looking for bogus Aztecs and other asylum seekers. Finding the Old Kennel locked with no sign of Aztecs, they swarmed in a pack like wolves towards the nearby Maya Towers. The hound-brained hooligans assumed from the name that the block housed real or bogus Aztecs. They can't be as local as they claim, because Maya Towers was privatized before the Aztecs ever got here. All the people living there are City gents and dealers, apart from janitors and security guards, one of whom called the police. "It's a total bankers-only area," the estate manager explained. "We can't have football hooligan types causing trouble here!"

STOP PRESS: HAS THE DISENHEARTENER STRUCK AGAIN?

Hundreds of hooligans were arrested, so by sunset the streets were safe enough for a group of Aztecs to go to the old Kennel to conduct one of their ceremonies, which now apparently include a blood donation session. However, at dawn a mutilated body was found near the brewery in Hanbury Street, where one of the original Ripper's victims died.

Sunday Sun

4/8/2013

## WIMPS OR WARRIORS? HEROINE SACKED FOR SPEAKING OUT!

Would you Belleslease it? Your favourite SAS girl Sally Harker is suspended from the Army and threatened with the sack, for blowing the whistle on the cover-up of Aztec involvement in the Disenheartener murders!

Litteldong writes: REINSTATE SOLDIER SAL!

**Inside:** News of the long-awaited film of Pritchard Litteldong's novel *Banned of Gypsies*. It's hoped that Sally Harker's first film role after leaving the army will be to star as model Mari Toneskin, who is arrested after discouraging bogus asylum seekers from trying to rape her by shooting them.

Daily Veil

5/8/2013

## DUTCHMAN NAMED AS DISENHEARTENER VICTIM

Police have identified the man found dead and mutilated in Hanbury Street as Rotterdam Rottweilers supporter

Ruud van Mann. Police refused to comment on suggestions that as most of the known hooligans in London had been arrested earlier that day at Maya Towers, this crime might be an Aztec human sacrifice. The first non-English victim is otherwise a similar character to the others. He had no convictions for soccer hooliganism, but was known to Dutch police. He had been awaiting sentence on a charge of wrecking an Indonesian restaurant, where he alleged there was too much spice in his reistaffel.

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To: **tamsintreed@aol.com**  
From: **Mark.Lowby@pavilion.co.uk**

I of D CID

6/8/2013

Dear Tam,

I may have to talk to some of your Aztec friends about this Disenheartener business. Just basic alibis, stuff like that.

Mark

-----  
To: **tamsintreed@aol.com**  
From: **Mark.Lowby@pavilion.co.uk**

8/8/2013

Cancel last message. We're bringing in a profiler, Home Office man. See you Sat I hope

Mark

*Sunday Sun*

11/8/2013

## FACE OF THE DOCKLAND KILLER: KERR-ACKER SPEAKS

Home office sick brain Doc Jimmy Kerr-Acker has pronounced on the Dockland Disenheartener. He says: "The person we are looking for is a loner, probably socially inadequate with few social skills. He may well have an interest in knives and famous serial killers. He probably lives alone, but if anyone sees anyone coming in at night and putting unusual cuts of meat into their fridge or freezer, please call Crimesnitch UK."

**SUNDAY SUN EDITOR PRITCHARD LITTELDONG SAYS:** Come off it, Doc! We all know that whatever the Home Office tell you to say, these murders are Aztec sacrifices carried out to tighten the Aztec grip on our cities.

**WHAT NEXT?** Well, the Unmuzzled Pitbulls are joining forces with the New Conquistadors, the Spanish Conquest Re-enactment Society, for a march to the Old Kennel. What Tyler has done is try to ban the march.

**WE SAY LET THE PEOPLE MARCH!  
KICK THESE AZTEC KILLERS OUT.**

-----  
To: **Mark.Lowby@pavilion.co.uk**

From: **tamsintreed@aol.com**

Dome

15/8/2013

Dear Mark

Is there anything anyone can do to stop the tabloids attacking the Aztecs? They're making all this sound as though the Aztecs are the only suspects for the Disenheartener killings, as if there hadn't been serial killers in England long before the Aztecs arrived. No one says anything about the wonderful work in biodiversity conservation that's going on here at the Dome. All this is having lots of bad effects. Donations are drying up, and it's getting difficult to afford enough food for the Serpent, which is now twice as long as it was and still growing.

Monty is losing it. He's very distressed, that now the valley is definitely going to be flooded and there's no going back there, everyone in England seems to be attacking the Aztecs. I mean physically attacking. Lots of these "New Conquistador" people are marching round the streets in armour, threatening anyone they see who looks remotely like an Aztec. Skinheads in Pitbull shirts are doing the same. Monty blames the papers, especially the *Sunday Sun*. Today he was saying that someone had to take a message to the gods that the Aztecs still worship them, and that Pritchard Litteldong might be the man to do it. Of course this doesn't mean he wants to harm Mr Litteldong, just that he's very, very fed up. Please help!

Tamsin

*Daily Telephone*

17/8/2013

## AZTEC THREAT TO EDITOR NOT LITERAL, SAY EXPERTS

Professor Pegasus and Dr Mendes, of the Aztec Studies Centre, University College Hampstead, have issued a statement that the supposed death-threat issued by Aztec spiritual leader Montezuma to *Sunday Sun* editor Pritchard Litteldong is not to be taken literally. "It is a religious opinion that Litteldong's continuous racist attacks on the Aztecs, linking them to the Dockland Disenheartener, has put his soul in a state of peril from which it needs to be rescued by a spiritual pilgrimage to the gods. Despite the nonsense written in the *Sunday Sun*, the original Aztec concept of sacrifice has now been subsumed into the practical sacrifice of blood donation. If there are any Aztec Fundamentalists who believe in traditional sacrifice, they would have remained in Belleslease, and not come to London with those who want only to live in peace."

Aztec convert Guatamoc Huitzelcoatl (Pierce Sandlove) said he believed in obeying the law, which unfortunately protected Litteldong. "But when will we be protected from being offended by Litteldong's slanderous, racist attacks?" he added.



Daily Veil

19/8/2013

## LITTELDONG DEATH THREAT: IS IT SERIOUS?

Dr Juan Castanet writes: "Frankly, I can't see why the Aztecs should be any keener to murder Litteldong than anyone else. The Mayans and Aztecs had no tradition of sending writers as messengers to the gods, certainly not terrible, over-rated writers like Litteldong. It's a disgrace that his so-called novel *Banned of Gypsies* won the Merdeoque Prize, when, for instance, my own *Peyote Paradise* wasn't short-listed, or indeed long-listed!

Sunday Sun Special Edition

Thursday 22/8/2013

## WHERE IS OUR EDITOR? HAS HE BEEN KIDNAPPED OR MURDERED?

The *Sunday Sun* is publishing a special midweek edition asking for your help in tracing our missing editor, Pritchard Litteldong. Deputy Editor Bekkie Mitchell writes: "Pritch went for a drink as usual on Monday night at the Blind Drunkard in Wapping. He went outside at 11.30 to wait for his taxi, and hasn't been seen since. Where is our Editor? Has he been seen by anyone? Has he been kidnapped by Aztecs? PLEASE HELP!"

**INSIDE: PLEASE FREE MY DADDY! By SVEN-GORAN LITTELDONG**

Daily Startle

Saturday 24/8/2013

## SUN EDITOR SACRIFICED: NATION MOURNS SLIGHTLY DISAPPOINTED, SAYS TYLER

It is now so long since *Sunday Sun* editor Pritchard Litteldong disappeared, that expert psychoanalyst Dr Jimmy Kerr-Acker believes he will not now turn up alive. "The profile is that he was kidnapped and murdered by someone who had a grudge against him. In theory this could apply to almost anyone he had ever written about, but in recent circumstances it probably means the Aztecs." The subtle shrink doubted this was the work of the Dockland Disenheartener. "There's no body, so that's a different profile."

Home Secretary Wat Tyler said that while human sacrifice was not a suitable means of settling disputes in the modern age, he was slightly disappointed at the tone towards the Aztecs adopted by many newspapers. "They have their ancient traditions which they are entitled to keep up without harassment by press or hooligans."

**AS A MARK OF RESPECT TO PRITCHARD LITTELDONG,  
THERE'S NO CORA PICTURE TODAY.  
SHE'S BACK TOMORROW!**

To: **Mark.Lowby@pavilion.co.uk**

From: **tamsintreed@aol.com**

Dome

27/8/2013

Dear Mark,

I am sorry you haven't found any clues in your search for Mr Litteldong, but I'm not surprised you didn't find any here. The Aztecs are really very gentle people and human sacrifice isn't at all typical of the way they live now. You admit yourself that there's no evidence that anyone's been disembowelled in the Temple area on top of the terrace at the Old Den. If the CCTV isn't working that's because the Pitbull hooligans smashed it. The altar area is kept very clean because it's now used for blood donor sessions.

Anyway, if Mr Litteldong had fallen foul of the Disenheartener, surely you'd have found his body, like the others? You searched a lot more thoroughly this time! I expect he's just gone on a holiday, which is basically what I feel like. It's been hard work, but things are under control here now, There's less trouble on the streets, and I've been able to collect all the data I need for the thesis. Donations to the Dome fund are up, and the financial crisis is over.

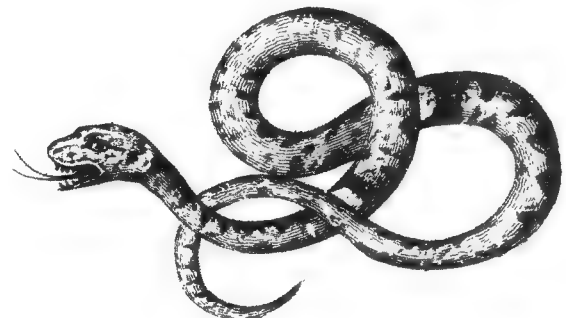
Even the Serpent is happy. He's still growing, and he's getting enough to eat now. In fact, he seems to have had a big meal fairly recently and now he's sleeping it off.

So I'm off for a break. I think you've seen the last of the Disenheartener, so why not forget him and come too?

Love,  
Tamsin.

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Peter T. Garratt's previous stories for *Interzone* include "The Collectivization of Transylvania" (issue 81), "The Hooded Man" (issue 104), "The Inauguration" (issue 115), "Under the Stars of Mars" (issue 119) and "A Connecticut Welshman at Artognov's Court" (issue 167). He lives in Brighton. He has also published many stories – fantasy, sf, crime and historical – in original anthologies edited by Mike Ashley.



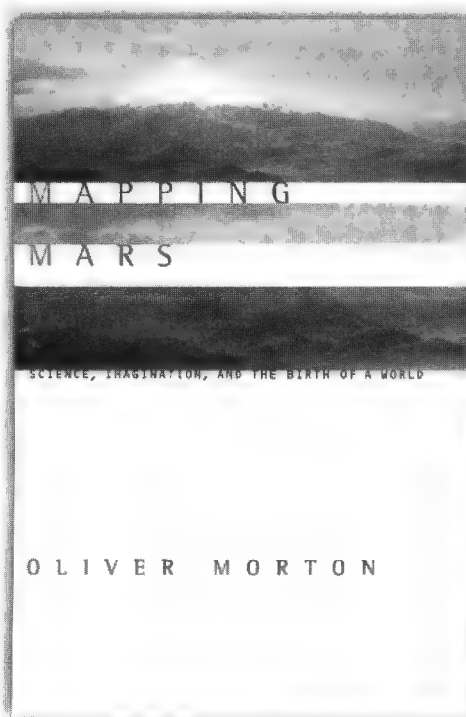
As scientific knowledge about Mars has grown apace, so the science-fictional depictions of the red planet have evolved from unfettered fantasies to chronicles of gritty realism. After the Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli compiled one of the first maps of Mars from telescopic observations, the eccentric Mars enthusiast Percival Lowell suggested that the network of long, linear features Schiaparelli called "canali" (channels) might well be irrigation canals dug by an ancient, water-hungry civilization, an imaginative bit of mistranslation that inspired the bellicose Martians of H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* and the romances of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Leigh Brackett and Ray Bradbury. Although the brief glimpses of a seemingly dead, cratered Moon-like world transmitted by the first Mariners as they zipped past Mars briefly killed off sf's interest in things Martian, maps produced from the orbital photographs of Mariner 9 and the two Viking missions revealed vast, strange geological wonders and traces of dry, ancient rivers and catastrophic floods, and led to a resurgence of Mars-based fiction in the 1990s, dominated by Kim Stanley Robinson's massive trilogy, *Red Mars*, *Green Mars* and *Blue Mars*. And more detailed orbital observations by the latest Mars probes have informed and enriched a secondary wave of realistic fictional descriptions of what it might be like for human beings to live and work on Mars.

The story of how Mars has turned from a point of red light to a place "measured in detail, and properly mapped" is told with great verve by Oliver Morton in *Mapping Mars: Science, Imagination and the Birth of a World* (Fourth Estate, £18.99). Morton is a science journalist who appears to have attended every scientific meeting about the planet in the past decade, read every important scientific paper and piece of Mars fiction, and talked to almost every scientist, artist, and cartographer currently involved with the interpretation of photographs and the making of maps of Mars. All of this research has been distilled into a fluid, wide-ranging narrative crammed with telling details and sly debunkings (for instance, recalibration of the Viking colour cameras has revealed that the surface of Mars isn't rust red after all, but orange-beige, and the sky isn't pink but a dull dun). There are evocative descriptions of Mars's fantastic landscapes, including a 15-page global tour that's as exhilarating as any in science fiction, lucid accounts of NASA's exploration of Mars and the techniques by which lines of latitude and longitude were accurately laid

## Mapping Mars

Paul McAuley

across the Martian globe, vivid sketches of the work and personalities of leading Mars scientists (such as Mike Carr, who wrote the definitive book on Martian topography, and Patricia Bridges and Jay Inge, who turned Mariner 9's photo mosaics into the astonishing 1:5 million shaded-relief scale map of the entire planet), and meditations on how human imagination and collaborations between artists and scientists have fleshed out an entire world from raw scientific data.



REVIEWED

Morton's overview of science fiction about Mars is not comprehensive – he overlooks the influence of John W. Campbell on the move towards more realistic depictions of Mars in the 1950s, and, perhaps understandably, elides the more fantastic Mars novels, from Burroughs to Ian McDonald. But his account of how maps of Mars have informed fictional treatments of Mars is well-argued and wide-ranging, noting, for instance, that the geography of Robert Heinlein's *Red Planet* was based on Lowell's maps, while Arthur C. Clarke's *The Sands of Mars* made use of the charts of Eugène Michel Antoniadi, and that Alan Moore's and Dave Gibbons's 1986 graphic novel *Watchmen* contained one of the first fictional treatments of the Martian landscapes revealed by the Mariner 9 and Viking probes.

Although the camera aboard the Mars Global Surveyor can pick out individual boulders on the Martian surface, the planet has not yet yielded all its secrets. Morton's discussion of the two major unanswered questions – whether significant amounts of water exist somewhere under the planet's surface, and the controversy over the discovery of what could be (but probably aren't) microfossils in the most famous piece of Martian rock on Earth, ALH 84001 – are scrupulously even-handed. Probes already on their way to Mars will undoubtedly answer some questions and uncover further mysteries; meanwhile, this eclectic and beautifully written book is a landmark synthesis of our current understanding of Mars, and I thoroughly recommend it to anyone interested in planetary exploration and the symbiosis of science and imagination.

Paul McAuley

Over a century has passed since the publication of *Flatland* (1884) by E. A. Abbott. This early sf novella relates the adventures of a two-dimensional creature, A. Square, who leaves his eponymous flat plain of existence and has to cope with the third dimension that we're all familiar with – the “up” and “down” of vertical movement.

*Spaceland* by Rudy Rucker (Tor, \$24.95), introduces us to Joe Cube. Cube is a regular guy, happily married and working (ironically) on the development of three-dimensional TV in California. In Abbott's classic, Square is visited by Sphere. In Rucker's novel, Cube encounters a four-dimensional woman, with equally disconcerting results. This woman, named Momo, alters Joe Cube in such a way that he can perceive the fourth spatial dimension, and eventually he even learns to move in it, in the directions – at 90 degrees to our three spatial ones – of *Vinn* and *Vout*.

Now remember: this isn't the fourth dimension of Time. Forget H. G. Wells. This is another dimension in Space. Cube's new spatial perception allows him to see inside 3-D objects by looking at them from this new direction. A sideways step either vinnward or voutward allows him to bypass our mundane 3-D walls, doors... but Rucker knows that it's not enough to present the 21st-century reader with a series of wonders. This is where he really scores.

*Spaceland* is a book about relationships as much as it is about higher dimensions of space. Rucker mirrors this tale of Joe Cube's conceptual breakthrough with an equally strong story about his emotional journey. Joe Cube, his wife Jena, his associate Spazz and girlfriend Tulip, all come across as a bunch of believable characters. The focus is on

## All Spaced Out

Nigel Brown

them and their problems throughout the novel. Rucker paints a realistic portrait this group, then goes on to develop it as the fourth dimension begins to intrude into their lives.

The original *Flatland* was also a satire on society, and this homage continues the tradition, by setting the story in California during the Y2K bug scare. Joe Cube and his hapless 3-D colleagues work in Silicon Valley, and Rucker makes very good mileage out of this. Rucker himself is professor of mathematics and computer science who lives in California, so he's well placed to describe the locality of the novel. This is true of his authority concerning the fourth dimension as well, as his major mathematical interest is in the spaces of higher dimensions, and he's written extensively on this subject before. I would particularly recommend his non-fiction book *The Fourth Dimension* (1985), which is almost a primer for this novel.

Rucker's expertise in giving *Spaceland* a solid footing is essential, as it soon becomes a more fantastic tale. Joe Cube discovers that the whole of our universe is a 3-D membrane between space in the Vinn direction and space in the Vout. He ventures voutward out into Momo's 4-D world, and Rucker does an excellent job of describing the impossible, using analogy and even diagrams. For Rucker is a cartoonist too. There's a section in *Flatland* where A. Square visits a one-dimensional “line” world in a dream sequence. Rucker mimics this by sending Joe Cube into a two-dimensional world. He uses cartoons to illustrate this. Far from distracting from the text, they ensure that the later analogies work for the reader.

Yet there's a curious levity associated with this subject. A classic early tale of the fourth spatial dimension is Robert A. Heinlein's “And He Built a Crooked House” (1940). In that story, again set in California, an architect builds a house which is a 3-D version of a fourth-dimensional cube. After an earthquake, the house really does become four-dimensional, leaving the

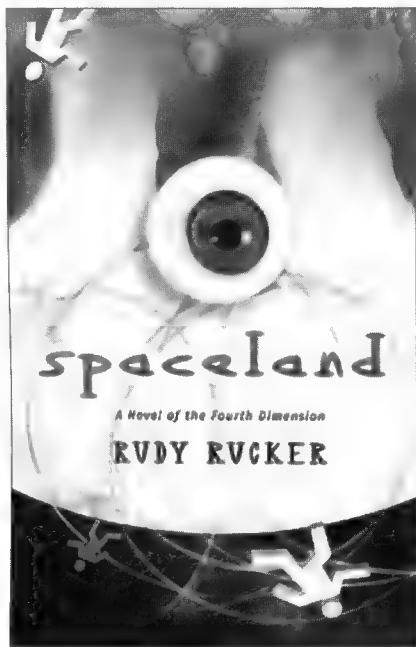
unfortunate occupants to cope with it, often in humorous ways. Rucker seems to be skirting the humorous in *Spaceland*, comically naming the 4-D characters “Momol,” “the Wackles,” “the Empress of Klupdom.” Given the events of the novel, these names jar somewhat, as if Rucker is trying to veer the novel away from the potential horror elements of the concept.

For they are there: the idea that our world can be invaded by mysterious creatures at any time, and there's no hiding place, has great potential in horror. Indeed, when the fourth spatial dimension first hit the headlines in the late 19th century, it was the spiritualists who took to the concept most readily. It seemed to explain ghosts in a scientific manner that appealed to the beliefs of the times. And Rucker has also treated this subject in a darker light, previously publishing a superb short story, “Message Found in a Copy of *Flatland*” (1983), which details the experiences of a man from our world who finds himself in the Flatland of E. A. Abbott.

If the fourth dimension sounds more like fantasy than sf, then a brief glance at modern theories soon convinces that concepts about higher spatial dimensions are again under serious consideration by orthodox physicists. Theodor Kaluza first wrote to Einstein in 1919 with the idea that our universe consists of more than three spatial dimensions, presenting an elegant solution to the unification of Einstein's gravity field equation with Maxwell's electromagnetic field equation. This idea has gone in and out of favour since, but the current buzz in physics is to postulate the reality of higher dimensional universes interacting with ours, known as “branes.” Those who watched a recent *Sky at Night* special (BBC TV) on the physicist Stephen Hawking saw him discussing this seriously with Sir Patrick Moore.

Ultimately, though, *Spaceland* stands up as good read. It goes beyond updating (or dimensionally upgrading?) Abbott's classic, and reminds us that we don't have to go “out there” to encounter sf wonders. They may be just around a fourth-dimensional corner.

John C. Wright's *The Golden Age* (Tor, \$24.95) is a debut novel that explores a different kind of space: virtual space. Set in a future about 10,000 years hence, it paints a complex background of changing virtual realities onto a relatively simple tale of lost identity. It describes a utopian world of immortals, where all individuals have control over the virtual worlds in which they live. Our hero, named Phaethon, is 3,000 years old and happy with his lot. Then he



discovers that parts of his identity have been lost, at his own instigation, to protect the idyllic life he has now. His entire society is seemingly in on the conspiracy.

Does he, or doesn't he, open the box that stores his lost memories? Or to put it another way: a base neuroform of the Silver-Gray Manorial School risks losing the services of the sophotech Rhadamanthus whilst in dispute with Helion Relic during High Transcendence after an encounter with a member of the Tritonic Neuroform Composition, from Neptune.

Got it? And so on, for 336 pages. The diction is a bit of a hurdle here, because Wright chooses to give no quarter to the reader when it comes to telling his story. He writes of a world where the scenery changes at a flick of a thought, and identities, memories and personalities can be amended at will. This is such a fluid environment that the reader is at risk of drowning in unfamiliar words, new concepts, dazzling scenery which is snatched away before one's bearings can be found.

Actually, it's not that bad. After 100 pages I'd roughly figured out what was going on, and by page 200 I was quite interested. If you enjoy slow-paced, intricate discussions against a kaleidoscope of changing scenery then this is the novel for you. For my money, I felt it could have been a quarter of the length. Then it would have been a superb evocation of the far future, with an exciting story to boot.

For concealed within this tale is a world stuffed with sense-of-wonder. Wright's imagination is first-rate, and he has created a credible terraformed Solar System, along with a memorably bizarre civilization. Nation states have been abolished, to be replaced by a hierarchy of artificial intelligences and differing levels of integrated

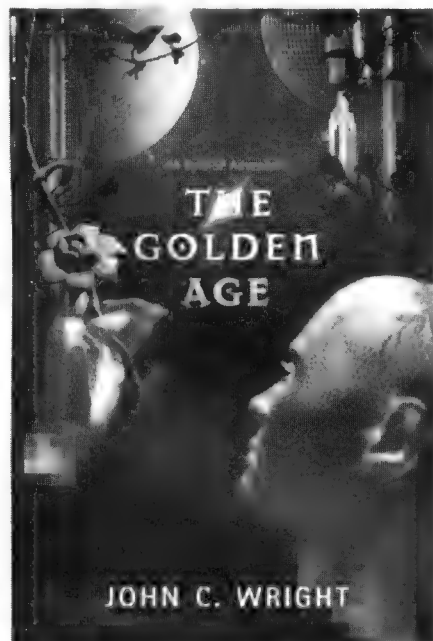
human minds. The individual human being lies in the bottom strata; the apex of this civilization is the Earthmind, a unified consciousness which combines the computing capacity of all the computers on Earth and in near-Earth orbit. The people of this age have a reverence for this entity, this technological manifestation of Gaia. Wright gives a curiously Victorian flavour to his future, with many of its inhabitants favouring an environment that mimics the 19th century. This is coupled, however, with their penchant for naming themselves after characters in Greek mythology. The name of Wright's protagonist comes from a mythological tale of the sun, personified as the divinity Helios, and his errant offspring called Phaethon. Phaethon drives his father's chariot across the sky, and rides the glowing orb too close to the Earth. Disaster follows and the world risks being destroyed by fire until he is struck down by a thunderbolt from Zeus.

This myth is somewhat paralleled in Wright's plot (his Phaethon in *The Golden Age* has a father who calls himself Helion. Helion has developed a "Solar Array" which has tamed the sun for this far-future civilization), but Wright has invented a better story than a simple retelling of this ancient myth. Phaethon tends to wander through this book puzzling about his past; his father Helion comes across as the stronger and more interesting character. At one point Helion tells of the fate of his friend Hyacinth-Subhelion Septimus Gray. These few pages are almost worth the price of the novel alone, describing the abuse of free will in such a liberated society.

But it's only fair to warn potential readers that *The Golden Age* is Volume One of Phaethon's adventure; it leaves the story hanging in midair. A second novel, *The Phoenix Exultant*, is due out in 2003 and we are assured that this does conclude the tale. I am looking forward to seeing how the story ends. I'd prefer not to have to wait so long, however. Volume Two, no doubt, will be written in the same style as Volume One. A slimmed-down version of both books in one volume might be an easier read. Maybe, one day, we'll have virtual reality that can do this for us...

On balance, I'm glad I stuck with *The Golden Age*. In truth, another reviewer had given up on it so I came to the novel with a wary eye, but my competitive spirit got me "over the hump" sufficiently to enjoy the nuggets of brilliance nestling within; however for some readers' time, like Phaethon, opening the lid of this box of experiences may be too high a price to pay.

Nigel Brown



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# BOOKS RECEIVED



## AUGUST 2002

This is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Anderson, Poul. **The Broken Sword**. "Fantasy Masterworks, 32." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07425-6, 274pp, B-format paperback, cover by Marten Eskil Winge, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1954; interestingly, this is *not* the familiar revised edition of 1971 [published in the USA by Ballantine Books and reprinted in Britain several times by Sphere Books]; although the publishers don't say so, what we seem to have here is a photo-reproduction of the original 1954 hardcover text – in print again for the first time in nearly 50 years; this wild Old Norse [and Old English] tale of elves and men has a good claim to being the late Poul Anderson's best fantasy [it is certainly Michael Moorcock's favourite, as he has told us often enough], and is well worth reading in this, its pristine, unadulterated, youthful form.) 12th September 2002.

Aylett, Steve. **Toxicology**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-57507-302-0, 131pp, B-format paperback, cover by Graham Roundthwaite, £5.99. (Quasi-sf/fantasy "slipstream" collection, first published in this form in the UK, 2001; it's an expansion of the slim volume of the same title published by Four Walls Eight Windows in the USA, 1999; six stories have been added for this UK edition; there are 26 pieces in all, many of them very short, several of them reprinted from original anthologies of recent years such as *Disco 2000*, *BritPulp*, *TechnoPagan*, *Sex, Drugs, Rock 'n' Roll* and *The New English Library Book of Internet Stories*; an Amazon.com reviewer is quoted on the back cover, describing the book as "a potent,

poisonous, post-cyberpunk cocktail of ultraviolence and outrage with a splash of Burroughs, a dash of Ballard, and a twist of Dick.") 12th September 2002.

Baker, Kage. **Black Projects, White Knights: The Company Dossiers**. Golden Gryphon Press [3002 Perkins Rd., Urbana, IL 61802, USA], ISBN 1-930846-11-8, xv+288pp, hardcover, cover by J. K. Potter, \$24.95. (Sf collection, first edition; it contains an author's introduction plus 14 stories, mostly reprinted from *Asimov's SF* [all since 1997], concerning time travel and the history-changing organization known as Dr Zeus, Inc., or "the Company"; three of the stories are original to the book; to order, see publishers' website: [www.goldengryphon.com](http://www.goldengryphon.com); Kage Baker is a relatively new American writer [born 1952, in California], and this is likely to be her first collection.) September 2002.

Barclay, James. **Elfsorrow**. "Legends of the Raven." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07329-2, 454pp, C-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £10.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition priced at £17.99 [not seen]; set in a world of warriors, mages and elves, this appears to be the first of a new threesome, following the author's earlier "Chronicles of the Raven" trilogy.) 22nd August 2002.

Baxter, Stephen, and Paul McAuley. **Reality Dust/Making History**. "Binary 4." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07306-3, 76+89pp, A-format paperback, covers by Jim Burns, £4.99. (Two sf novellas, arranged dos-à-dos, first edition in this format; this is half of the anthology *Futures*, edited by Peter Crowther [Gollancz, April 2001], whose individual novellas, Baxter's *Reality Dust* and McAuley's *Making History*, were first published as slim volumes by the small-press PS Publishing in 2000.) 8th August 2002.

Bear, Greg. **The Collected Stories of Greg Bear**. Tor, ISBN 0-765-30160-1, 653pp, hardcover, \$29.95. (Sf collection, first edition; it contains two dozen stories, spanning Bear's career from the early 1970s to the present; there's also an author's introduction and appendix, plus individual intros and afterwords to all the stories; solid stories, solid book.) 26th September 2002.

Berg, Carol. **Revelation**. "Book Two of The Rakirah." Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-045-8, 485pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 2000; a follow-up to the debut novel *Transformation* [2000] – by a new, but not young, American writer [born 1948].) 1st August 2002.

Betancourt, John Gregory. **Roger Zelazny's The Dawn of Amber: Book One of the New Amber Trilogy**. ibooks, ISBN 0-7434-5240-2, 319pp, hardcover, cover by Scott Grimando, \$25. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the title says it all: this is the first of a series of prequels-by-another-hand to the late Roger Zelazny's popular "Amber" sequence, "fully authorized by the Zelazny estate"; it seems the book is also distributed in the UK, priced at £10.99, although whether that is a hardcover or a trade paperback is not made clear.) September 2002.

Bonanno, Margaret Wander. **Preternatural**<sup>3</sup>. Tor, ISBN 0-312-87760-9, 335pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; sequel to *Preternatural* [1996] and *Preternatural Too* [2000].) 10th September 2002.

Borchardt, Alice. **The Dragon Queen**. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-05062-2, 473pp, C-format paperback, cover by Scott McKowen, £10.99. (Arthurian fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 2002; described as a "wonderfully subversive reworking of a legendary tale," it's yet another retelling of the story of Guinevere [compare Nancy McKenzie's *Queen of Camelot*, below]; chapter one is headed "Cornwall, England," which may immediately strike some of us as anachronistic [Cornwall wasn't incorporated into England until – when? – something like the tenth century, certainly a long time after Arthur's putative era]; the author, a professional nurse who lives in Texas, is the sister of bestselling novelist Anne Rice.) 8th August 2002.

Bova, Ben. **The Rock Rats**. "The Asteroid Wars: II." New English Library, ISBN 0-340-76959-9, 440pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Harrison, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 2002; follow-up to *The Precipice* [2001]; having done the Moon, Mars, Venus and Jupiter in his usual *Carpetbaggers-in-space* manner, Bova moves on to the Asteroids: "Martin Humphries – the fabulously wealthy, coldly ruthless owner of the greatest space-based industrial giant – has been checked, but his malice and ambition remain...") 15th August 2002.

Bradbury, Ray. **From the Dust Returned: A Family Remembrance**. Earthlight, ISBN 0-7434-2998-2, xi+204pp, A-format paperback, cover by Trevor Scobie, £6.99. (Fantasy fix-up novel, first published in the USA, 2001; like several other Bradbury novels over the decades, it's a cobbling-together, with new material, of old short stories – in this case, his tales of the weird and wizardly Elliott family: "The Traveller" [1946], "Homecoming" [1946], "Uncle Einar" [1947], "The April Witch" [1952], "On the Orient North" [1988] and "West of October" [1988]; interestingly, Bradbury states in his afterword that he originally conceived the book as a collaboration with the late cartoonist of *New Yorker* fame, Charles Addams.) 4th September 2002.

Bradbury, Ray. **The Illustrated Man**. "Voyager Classics." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-712774-X, 240pp, B-format paperback, £8.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1951; number 33 in the plain blue-covered "Voyager Classics" series; the contents follow the 1952 British edition [Rupert Hart-Davis], which differed by several stories from the US first edition.) 19th August 2002.

Brandon, Paul. **Swim the Moon**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-87793-5, 380pp, trade paperback, cover by Rafal Olbinski, \$14.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 2001; "a mystical tale of love, music and magic set off the stormy coast of Scotland," this is a debut novel by a British-born Australian author.) 10th September 2002.

Brooks, Terry. **Morgawr: The Voyage of the Jerle Shannara, Book Three**. Earthlight, ISBN 0-7432-6109-6, 401pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Stone, £17.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 2002; follow-up to *Ilse Witch* [2000] and

the unfortunately-titled *Antrax* [2001], in this subset of Brooks's popular "Shannara" series.) 2nd September 2002.

Brown, Eric. **New York Blues: Book Two in the Virex Trilogy.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-57507-301-2, 309pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 2001 [was there a hardcover edition? – if so, we didn't see it]; second in a trilogy of crime capers set in the America 40 years hence, and involving virtual reality; the first, *New York Nights* [2000] was reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 161.) 12th September 2002.

Burroughs, Edgar Rice. **The Moon Maid. Complete and Restored.** Introduction by Terry Bisson. Afterword by Richard J. Golsan. Illustrated by Thomas Floyd. "Bison Frontiers of Imagination." Bison Books [University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE 68588-0255, USA], ISBN 0-8032-6200-0, xiii+378pp, trade paperback, cover by Floyd, £14.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1926; this is the recent American edition with a UK price and publication date, distributed in the UK by Combined Academic Publishers Ltd, 15a Lewin's Yard, East St., Chesham, Bucks. HP5 1HQ; it consists of the three short novels, "The Moon Maid," "The Moon Men" and "The Red Hawk," first published in *Argosy All-Story Weekly* [1923-1925], then combined by the author as a single novel [1926]; in this new edition the original text has been restored in full, and differences between the magazine and book texts are annotated; as well as new illustrations, and an introduction and afterword, this attractive edition contains an article by Philip R. Burger, "Red Blood vs. the Red Flag," and an extensive glossary and notes; recommended as an essential volume for all Burroughs enthusiasts.) 1st August 2002.

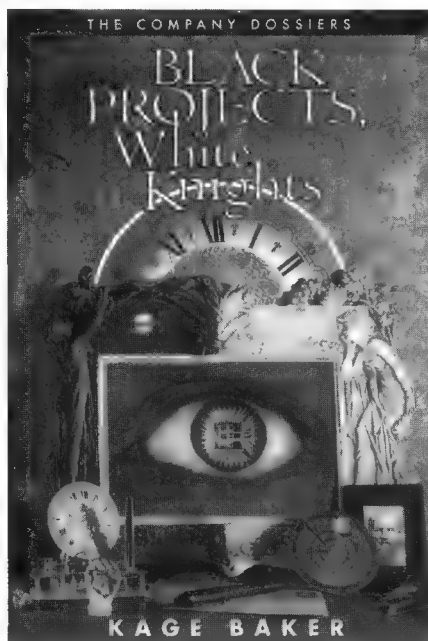
Campbell, Ramsey. **Scared Stiff: Tales of Sex and Death.** Introduction by Clive Barker. Tor, ISBN 0-765-30004-4, 239pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Horror collection, first published in the USA, 1987; this enhanced edition contains three newly-collected stories – "The Limits of Fantasy" [1992], "The Body in the Window" [1995] and "Kill Me Hideously" [1997] – plus an afterword by the author dated 28 May 2001.) 12th September 2002.

Card, Orson Scott. **Shadow Puppets.** "Book Three of the Shadow Saga." Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-098-9, 348pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 2002; follow-up to *Ender's Shadow* [1999] and *Shadow of the Hegemon* [2000], in the recent series of belated sequels to Card's greatest success, *Ender's Game* [1985].) 29th August 2002.

Chadbourne, Mark. **Always Forever: Book Three of The Age of Misrule.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-60372-4, 560pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jon Sullivan, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 2001; third of a series which seems to be tilted towards the horror end of the fantasy scale.) 12th September 2002.

Chadbourne, Mark. **The Fairy Feller's Master Stroke.** Introduction by Neil Gaiman. PS Publishing [Hamilton House, 4 Park Ave., Harrogate, N. Yorks. HG2 9BQ], ISBN 1-902880-32-3, 109pp, small-press trade paperback, cover by Richard Dadd, £8. (Horror/fantasy

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novella, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition priced at £25 [not seen]; this is a signed edition, limited to 500 numbered paperback copies and 300 numbered hardcover copies; Gaiman's intro mainly concerns the eponymous fairy painting, by insane Victorian artist Richard Dadd, which adorns the front of this book [reproduced by courtesy of the Tate Gallery]; evidently, Dadd's strange work also plays a large role in Chadbourne's novella.) Late entry: May publication, received in August 2002.

Chizmar, Richard, and Robert Morrish, eds. **October Dreams: A Celebration of Halloween.** Roc, ISBN 0-451-45895-8, 648pp, trade paperback, cover by James Nelson, \$16. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA, 2000; a mixture of old and new stories, non-fiction articles and personal reminiscences, all celebrating the Halloween folk festival [31st October]; most of the contributors are American – Ray Bradbury, Poppy Z. Brite, Michael Cadnum, Jack Cady, Hugh B. Cave, Douglas Clegg, Stefan Dziemianowicz, Elizabeth Engstrom, Dennis Etchison, Owl Goingback, Ed Gorman, Charles L. Grant, Rick Hautala, Jack Ketchum, Caitlin R. Kiernan, Dean Koontz, Thomas Ligotti, the late Richard Laymon, Thomas F. Monteleone, William F. Nolan, Yvonne Navarro, Tom Piccirilli, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Lewis Shiner, John Shirley, David B. Silva, Peter Straub, Steve Rasnic Tem, Gahan Wilson, Douglas E. Winter and others – but there's also a British contingent: Ramsey Campbell, Simon Clark, Peter Crowther, Tim Lebbon, Kim Newman and Michael Marshall Smith; or, rather, we should say an English contingent – and thereby the editors have missed a trick [or treat], for, so far as we can tell, there are no Scots in this book; and what do the English know of Halloween? [they celebrate Guy Fawkes Day] – but Halloween is big in Scotland.) September 2002.

Cohen, Jack, and Ian Stewart. **Evolving the Alien.** "The Science of Extraterrestrial Life." Ebury Press, ISBN 0-091-87927-2, xiii+369pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Popular science text, first edition; scientists, science proselytizers, science-fiction writers, collaborators with Terry

Pratchett, and *Interzone* contributors, Messrs Stewart and Cohen here produce a solid primer on "Astrobiology and Xenoscience," "The Drake Equation," "The Evolution of Alien Life," "Modelling Alien Ecosystems," "The Universality of Extelligence," "Have Aliens Visited Us?" and "Galactic Empires" – to cite a few of their chapter headings; they also quote from a number of sf works; recommended as an antidote to all those UFO books.) 5th September 2002.

Craig, Brian. **Storm Warriors: The Third Tale of Orfeo.** "A Warhammer Novel." Games Workshop/Black Library [Willow Rd., Lenton, Nottingham NG7 2WS], ISBN 1-85154-259-8, 254pp, A-format paperback, cover by Clint Langley, £5.99. (Fantasy role-playing game spinoff novel, first published in the UK, 1991; "Brian Craig" is a pseudonym of Brian Stableford; as with earlier reprints of the older novels in this GW series, the text has been re-set in its entirety, so it may be that it has also been revised somewhat.) September 2002.

Datlow, Ellen, and Terri Windling, eds. **The Green Man: Tales from the Mythic Forest.** Decorations by Charles Vess. Viking, ISBN 0-670-03526-2, 390pp, hardcover, cover by Vess, \$18.99. (Young-adult fantasy anthology, first edition; proof copy received; it contains all-new stories, on the ever-fascinating, woody old "green man" theme, by M. Shayne Bell, Emma Bull, Michael Cadnum, Charles de Lint, Carol Emshwiller, Jeffrey Ford, Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Kathe Koja, Tanith Lee, Patricia A. McKillip, Delia Sherman, Midori Snyder and others; there are also poems by Neil Gaiman and Jane Yolen; recommended.) Late entry: 20th May publication, received in August 2002.

Davies, Steven Paul. **The Prisoner Handbook.** Foreword by Alex Cox. "An unauthorized companion." Bantam, ISBN 0-7522-1968-5, 272pp, trade paperback, £14.99. (Guide to the sf/mystery TV series of the 1960s which starred Patrick McGeehan; first edition; illustrated with eight pages of photographs; there must have been a dozen books about *The Prisoner* already, but this one is described as a "definitive fan club companion" [the club being Six of One: The Prisoner Appreciation Society] and is timed to mark the show's 35th anniversary.) 7th September 2002.

De Lint, Charles. **Forests of the Heart.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07294-6, xii+521pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 2000; another tome in Canadian author de Lint's characteristic urban-fantasy vein, "bringing folklore, music and unforgettable characters to life on modern city streets.") 8th August 2002.

De Lint, Charles. **The Onion Girl.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07272-5, 508pp, C-format paperback, £10.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 2001; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition priced at £17.99 [not seen]; set in the imaginary city of Newford – "where magic lights dark streets, where myths walk in modern shapes" – it incorporates the short story "In the House of My Enemy," from the author's collection *Dreams Underfoot* [1993].) 15th August 2002.

Eddings, David. **The Sapphire Rose: Book Three of The Elenium.** "Voyager Classics." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-712783-9, 652pp, B-format

paperback, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; number 35 in the plain blue-covered "Voyager Classics" series.) 19th August 2002.

Erikson, Steven. **Memories of Ice: A Tale of the Malazan Book of the Fallen**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-81312-9, 1194pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Stone, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 2001; third of a promised ten-volume sequence of massive tomes by this Canadian author; what will our descendants think of us should they stumble across these huge books with their entirely made-up worlds and lack of evident purchase on reality? – such fantasy epics will probably seem as vast and impenetrable as the French "courtly romances" of the 17th century, the ones that Alexander Pope mocked in *The Rape of the Lock* [1714].) 3rd October 2002.

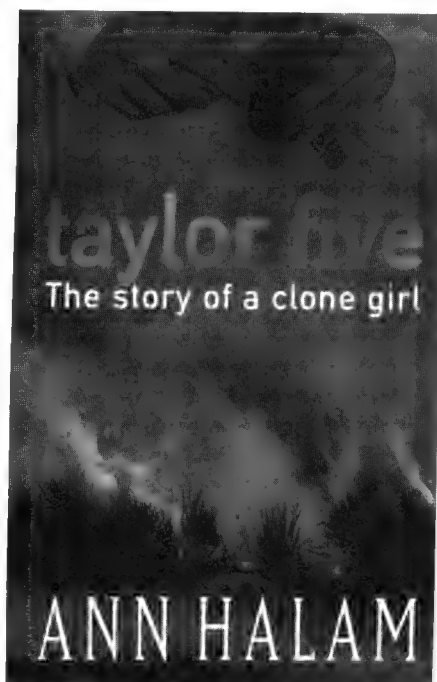
Feist, Raymond E. **Magician**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-713411-8, 681pp, hardcover, £25. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1982; it follows the text of the 1992 revised edition; this is a special 20th-anniversary signed "Deluxe Edition" with gold lettering on an otherwise plain cover.) 2nd September 2002.

Feist, Raymond E. **Talon of the Silver Hawk: Conclave of Shadows, Book One**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224681-3, 390pp, hardcover, cover by Martin McKenna, £17.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; the opening of "a sweeping new epic fantasy series from [the] worldwide bestselling author.") 2nd September 2002.

Finney, Charles G. **The Circus of Dr. Lao**. Introduction by John Marco. Illustrated by Boris Artzybasheff. "Bison Frontiers of Imagination." Bison Books [University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE 68588-0255, USA], ISBN 0-8032-6907-2, xv+154pp, trade paperback, cover by Artzybasheff, £9.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1935; this is the recent American edition with a UK price and publication date, distributed in the UK by Combined Academic Publishers Ltd, 15a Lewin's Yard, East St., Chesham, Bucks. HP5 1HQ; a classic short novel about a mysterious supernatural circus which arrives in a small Arizona town in the 1930s, it's said to have inspired Ray Bradbury among others; the author [1905-1984] was an American journalist who wrote few other works of fiction; this is a reprint of the first edition, with its original, and excellent, illustrations; recommended.) 1st August 2002.

Goodkind, Terry. **Debt of Bones**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-57507-311-X, 116pp, A-format paperback, cover by Keith Parkinson, £4.99. (Fantasy novella, first published in the USA, 2001; set in the world of the author's "Sword of Truth" series of Big Commercial Fantasies, it's an expansion of his novelette which first appeared in Robert Silverberg's anthology *Legends* [1998]; it's illustrated throughout with pencil drawings, although the artist isn't named – is it Goodkind himself?) 8th August 2002.

Halam, Ann. **Taylor Five**. "The story of a clone girl." Dolphin, ISBN 1-85881-792-7, 177pp, B-format paperback, £4.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first edition; it's set in Borneo and involves orang-utans, as well as a human clone; "Ann Halam" is a pseudonym of Gwyneth Jones.) 29th August 2002.



Hamilton, Peter F. **Misspent Youth**. Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-90070-7, 358pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a tale of rejuvenation, set a few decades in the future.) 8th November 2002.

Harrison, M. John. **Light**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07025-0, 335pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; there will be a simultaneous trade paperback edition priced at £10.99; a new out-and-out sf novel by the author of *The Centauri Device* [1974] – to which this new book is compared; it comes with advance commendations from Iain M. Banks and Stephen Baxter.) 17th October 2002.

Haydon, Elizabeth. **Destiny**. "The epic fantasy for the third millennium." Gollancz, ISBN 1-85798-992-9, xvi+558pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 2001; conclusion of the trilogy begun with *Rhapsody: Child of Blood* [1999] and *Prophecy: Child of Earth* [2000] – although, oddly, this one doesn't have a "Child of..." subtitle.) 12th September 2002.

Haydon, Elizabeth. **Requiem for the Sun**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-87884-2, 462pp, hardcover, cover by Royo, \$27.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a new follow-up to the "Rhapsody" trilogy [see above].) 18th September 2002.

Herbert, Brian, and Kevin J. Anderson. **The Butlerian Jihad: Legends of Dune, I**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-82330-5, viii+616pp, hardcover, cover by Gerry Grace, £18.99. (Sf spinoff novel, first edition; another prequel to the late Frank Herbert's bestselling *Dune* [1965], following the now-completed "Prelude to Dune" trilogy by the original author's son, Brian Herbert, and his prolific jack-of-all-trades collaborator Kevin J. Anderson; this is the first in yet another trilogy: no end is in sight.) 12th September 2002.

Herbert, Brian, and Kevin J. Anderson. **The Butlerian Jihad**. "Dune." Tor, ISBN 0-765-30157-1, 621pp, hardcover, cover by Stephen Youll, \$27.95. (Sf spinoff novel, first published in

the UK, 2002; there is a simultaneous limited edition [not seen]; prequel to the late Frank Herbert's *Dune* [1965]; this is the same as the British edition, above, except that it does not carry the "Legends of Dune" sub-title; since the plot concerns the overthrow of a machine-dominated civilization, it's likely that the adjective "Butlerian" in the title is a reference to Samuel Butler, author of *Erewhon* [1872], and in particular to that satirical novel's section known as "The Book of the Machines.") 17th September 2002.

Kelly, James Patrick. **Strange But Not a Stranger**. Introduction by Connie Willis. Golden Gryphon Press [3002 Perkins Rd., Urbana, IL 61802, USA], ISBN 1-930846-12-6, xiii+297pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$25.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; it contains 15 stories and an author's afterword; most of these pieces are reprinted from Asimov's *SF*, with a couple from *F&SF*, a sprinkling from other sources, and one previously unpublished; to order, see publishers' website: [www.goldengryphon.com](http://www.goldengryphon.com); another good-looking, well-produced volume of literate fantastic fiction from Golden Gryphon, it's co-dedicated to that press's founder: "In Memory of Jim Turner, 1945-1999.") September 2002.

King, Stephen. **From a Buick 8**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-77069-4, 404pp, hardcover, cover by Larry Rostant, £17.99. (Horror novel, first edition [? – probably simultaneous with the US edition from Scribner]; the latest King opus seems to be, just as its title promises, a story about an automobile – perhaps a revisitation of the territory of his much earlier novel *Christine*?) 28th August 2002.

King, Stephen, and Peter Straub. **Black House**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-710044-2, 819pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 2001; King and Straub's "long-awaited" new collaboration, following *The Talisman* [1984]; reviewed, approvingly, by John Clute in *Interzone* 176.) 2nd September 2002.

Kress, Nancy. **Probability Space**. Tor, ISBN 0-765-30170-9, 367pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; a follow-up to *Probability Moon* [2000] and *Probability Sun* [2001].) 13th September 2002.

Lackey, Mercedes. **Brightly Burning**. "The Legendary Story of Herald Lavan Firestorm." Gollancz, ISBN 0-57507-296-2, 406pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jon Sullivan, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 2000 [not "2002" as it implies inside]; latest in the author's loose and apparently never-ending "Valdemar" series.) 8th August 2002.

Lee, Samantha. **The Belltower**. "Point Horror Unleashed." Scholastic, ISBN 0-439-99469-1, 236pp, A-format paperback, cover by Tim Edmonds, £4.99. (Juvenile horror novel, first edition.) 16th August 2002.

Lessing, Doris. **Shikasta. Canopus in Argos: Archives. Re: Colonised Planet 5**. "Voyager Classics." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-712776-6, 448pp, B-format paperback, £8.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1979; number 34 in the plain blue-covered "Voyager Classics" series; a work by a famous mainstream writer which, frankly, has never been much liked within the sf

field, although we note it has been through at least 16 Granada, Grafton or Flamingo paperback printings in the UK prior to this first Voyager one; also, it garnered some amazing reviews when it first appeared, e.g. the one quoted on the back cover: "Shikasta is at once a brief history of the world, a tract against human destructiveness, an ode to the natural beauties of this earth and a hymn to the music of the spheres" – *Time*.) 19th August 2002.

Lindholm, Megan. **Cloven Hooves.** "Voyager Classics." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-712773-1, 360pp, B-format paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; number 30 in the plain blue-covered "Voyager Classics" series.) 19th August 2002.

Lindholm, Megan. **Wizard of the Pigeons.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-711256-4, 298pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Gregory, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986; a stand-alone work of urban fantasy, set in Seattle; the cover describes the author as "Megan Lindholm... who also writes as Robin Hobb.") 5th August 2002.

Lindsay, David. **A Voyage to Arcturus. Commemorative Edition.** Introduction by John Clute. Afterword by Loren Eiseley. "Bison Frontiers of Imagination." Bison Books [University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE 68588-0255, USA], ISBN 0-8032-8004-1, xv+272pp, trade paperback, cover illustration unattributed, £10.95. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1920; this is the recent American edition with a UK price and publication date, distributed in the UK by Combined Academic Publishers Ltd, 15a Lewin's Yard, East St., Chesham, Bucks. HP5 1HQ; a classic of the weird, about an earthman's journey to the planet Tormance in orbit around the star Arcturus, it has some of the trappings of science fiction but is really more of a metaphysical fantasy; the author [1876-1945] was British; the afterword by the late Loren Eiseley dates from an earlier edition of 1963; recommended.) 1st August 2002.

Lindsay, David. **A Voyage to Arcturus.** Introduction by Alan Moore. Afterword by Colin Wilson. Savoy Books [446 Wilmslow Rd., Withington, Manchester M20 3BW], ISBN 0-86130-111-0, xxi+398pp, hardcover, cover by John Coulthart (after Jean Delville), £30. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1920; oops! – that was well-timed, wasn't it?: two new editions of Lindsay's classic weird fantasy appearing virtually simultaneously [see above]; this Savoy hardcover is much the more lavish of the two, with its heavy paper and gold-trimmed upper edges; following the text of the novel, it also reprints in its entirety Colin Wilson's 1979 critical booklet *The Haunted Man: The Strange Genius of David Lindsay* [pp 329-386 of this edition], followed by several pages of "Philosophical Aphorisms" by Lindsay and, tipped in as though it's a last-minute addition, a new three-page afterword by Wilson; recommended as the edition of choice for those who want a handsome, long-lasting copy.) 5th August 2002.

Lindskold, Jane. **Wolf's Head, Wolf's Heart.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87426-X, 608pp, hardcover, cover by Julie Bell, \$27.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; sequel to *Through Wolf's Eyes* [2001]; it's

"a tale of humane wolves, beastly men, and a brilliant heroine.") 27th August 2002.

Lovecraft, H. P. **The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories.** Edited by S. T. Joshi. "Penguin Classics." Penguin, ISBN 0-141-187-069, xxv+420pp, B-format paperback, cover by Michele Turriani, £7.99. (Horror collection, first published in the USA and UK, 1999; this, like the following volume, was originally published in the series "Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics," but is now reissued without the "Twentieth-Century" qualification; it contains 18 pieces, including such well-known quasi-sf tales as "The Colour Out of Space," "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" and the title story; recommended, together with the volume below, as the paperback edition of Lovecraft to have.) 8th August 2002.

Lovecraft, H. P. **The Thing on the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories.** Edited by S. T. Joshi. "Penguin Classics." Penguin, ISBN 0-141-187-077, xx+443pp, B-format paperback, cover by Michele Turriani, £7.99. (Horror collection, first published in the USA and UK, 2001; it contains a dozen pieces, including the short novels "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" and "At the Mountains of Madness"; the extraordinary repackaging of pulpster Howard Phillips Lovecraft [1890-1937] as an acknowledged "classic" of modern literature continues apace: just a few years after the Ballantine/Del Rey three-volume trade paperback edition of the mid-1990s, which contained all HPL's tales, Penguin Books are doing likewise, in handsome editions with meticulously corrected texts introduced and heavily annotated by the leading HPL scholar S. T. Joshi.) 8th August 2002.

Lowder, James, ed. **Legends of the Pendragon.** "Pendragon Fiction." Green Knight Publishing [900 Murmansk St., Suite 5, Oakland, CA 94607, USA], ISBN 1-928999-19-0, 319pp, trade paperback, cover by Don Maitz, \$19.95 [£13.99 in the UK]. (Arthurian fantasy anthology, first edition; an all-original anthology on the theme of: "What made Britain ready for the coming of Camelot? How were the glorious victories and stunning failures of the

Brotherhood of the Round Table foreshadowed in the tragedy of Vortigern, the grim tyrant who welcomed the treacherous Saxons as allies...?" [Note how the bad-mouthing of the "Saxons" – otherwise known as the English – continues to this day, thanks to the popularity of the Arthurian myths]; the 20 stories here, all concentrating on aspects of the earlier part of the cycle, are by Cherith Baldry, Nancy Varian Berberick, Peter T. Garratt, Phyllis Ann Karr, Darrell Schweitzer, Keith Taylor and others, probably mainly Americans, whose names are less familiar.) *Late entry: June publication, received in September 2002.*

McKenzie, Nancy. **Queen of Camelot: The Tale of Guinevere and King Arthur.** Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-149-7, 867pp, A-format paperback, £7.99. (Arthurian fantasy omnibus; the two novels it contains, *The Child Queen* and *The High Queen*, were first published in the USA, 1994 and 1995, and previously appeared in the UK as Legend paperbacks, both 1997.) 1st August 2002.

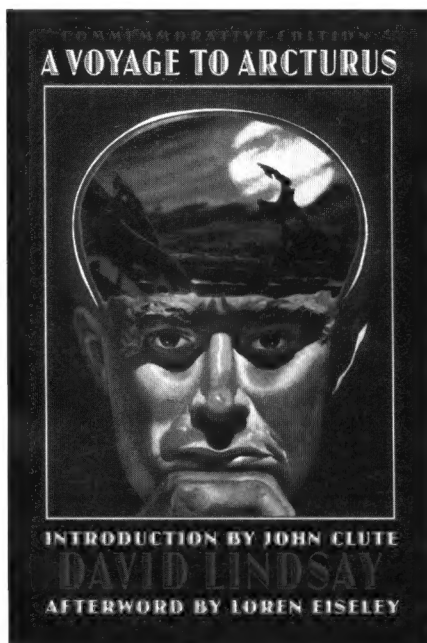
Martin, George R. R., with Melinda M. Snodgrass, eds. **Wild Cards XVI: Deuces Down. A Mosaic Novel.** Illustrated by Timothy Truman. ibooks, ISBN 0-7434-4505-8, x+325pp, hardcover, cover by Steranko, \$23. (Sf/fantasy shared-world anthology, first edition; the first new "Wild Cards" book in some years, it contains stories, or "mosaic-novel" segments, by Michael Cassutt, Stephen Leigh, John J. Miller, Walton Simons, Melinda M. Snodgrass and others; it's not clear whether any of it is actually written by George R. R. Martin – probably not; it is also distributed in the UK, priced at £12.99 [if one believes the jacket flap] or £14.99 [according to the accompanying publicity sheet]; see website, [www.ibooksinc.com](http://www.ibooksinc.com), for further details.) August 2002.

Mixon, Laura J. **Burning the Ice.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86903-7, 544pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's described as "an exciting, heroic, and scientifically realistic tale of the first human colonization of another star system.") August 2002.

Morrill, Rowena. **The Art of Rowena.** Text by Doris Vallejo. Foreword by Greg and Tim Hildebrandt. Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85585-963-7, 112pp, very large-format paperback, cover by Rowena, £14.99. (Fantasy art portfolio, first published in the UK, 2000; a good selection of the polished, almost photo-realistic, book-cover and other paintings of this popular American illustrator of the fantastic; there is a useful listing of all her works at the rear of the volume; there was an earlier volume entitled *The Art of Rowena* published in the 1980s, but this is not identical.) 19th September 2002.

Morris, Mark. **The Uglimen.** Introduction by Stephen Laws. PS Publishing [Hamilton House, 4 Park Ave., Harrogate, N. Yorks. HG2 9BQ], ISBN 1-902880-42-0, 144pp, small-press trade paperback, cover by Edward Miller, £8. (Horror novella, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition priced at £25 [not seen]; this is a signed edition, limited to 500 numbered paperback copies and 300 numbered hardcover copies.) *Late entry: May publication, received in August 2002.*

Newcomb, Robert. **The Fifth Sorceress: Volume I of the Chronicles of Blood and**





**Stone.** "The Epic Fantasy of the Year." Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-04961-6, 591pp, C-format paperback, cover by Justin Sweet, £10.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 2002; the debut Big Commercial

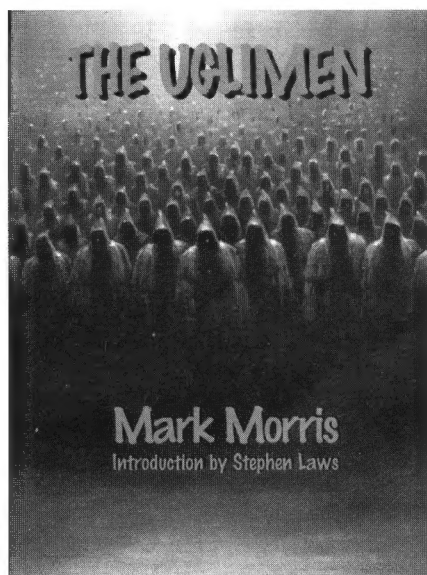
Fantasy of a new American writer, even if the byline suggests a pseudonym [a newcomer called "Newcomb"?] and sounds all too much like someone who is trying to squeeze Blood out of a Stone; we're told that this book "set off a major bidding war between publishing houses in New York"; so what's the big idea, the High Concept, that put those publishers in a tizzy?; it's this: "Tristan, prince of Eutracia, knows it is his destiny to be crowned king, however much he dislikes the notion. Preferring the irresponsibilities of life as a prince in waiting, his coronation draws uncomfortably near. But his fate is sealed when his kingdom is assailed by a monstrous army, misshapen slaves of the long-banished, vengeance-seeking Sorceresses from across the Sea of Whispers. Together with his tutor, guide and adviser, the wizard Wigg, Tristan must cross this uncrossable sea and face the sorceresses in their lair – for they have taken his twin sister captive and stolen the magic of Eutracia for their own vile purposes. And on this storm-tossed journey fraught with danger, he is pressed to learn the nature of magic. For unbeknownst to Tristan, not only is he to inherit the crown of Eutracia, but also a far greater burden. For he is the Chosen One of whom the Prophecies foretold, the one upon whose shoulders rests the ultimate balance of Good and Evil in this world..." [quotation from the publicity sheet which accompanies the book; all capitalizations sic.] 2nd September 2002.

Nix, Garth. **Sabriel.** Collins Children's Books, no ISBN shown, 367pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in Australia, 1995; proof copy received; this seven-year-old book is appearing in the UK for the first time, and for some reason the British publishers have been getting all excited about it, as though it's a great new discovery [this must be due to the Harry Potter boom – a bit like the dot.com bubble?]; it comes with praise from Lloyd Alexander and Philip Pullman; the author is Australian, born 1963, and it seems he has been well known over there for quite some time; a sequel called *Lirael* came out in Australia and the USA in 2001, and presumably will see UK publication in due course.) 2nd September 2002.

Norton, Andre, and Mercedes Lackey.

**Elvenborn: Book Three of the Halfblood Chronicles.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86456-6, 382pp, hardcover, cover by Julie Bell, \$24.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; belated follow-up to the same authors' *The Elvenbane* [1991] and *Elvenblood* [1995].) 28th August 2002.

Park, Paul. **If Lions Could Speak and Other Stories.** Cosmos Books, ISBN 1-58715-508-7, 194pp, trade paperback, cover by Rosalie Winard, \$15. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; the author's first gathering of shorter fiction, it contains 13 subtle stories; four of them – "The Tourist" [1994], "Bukavu Dreams" [1999], "Self-Portrait with Melanoma, Final Draft" [2001] and "If Lions Could Speak" [2002] – first appeared in *Interzone*; of the other stories, several appeared in such magazines as *Asimov's SF*, *F&SF* and *Omni*,



one is a novel extract, and one is original to the book; this volume comes with commendations from such notable peers of Paul Park's as Terry Bisson, John Crowley, Jonathan Lethem, Kim Stanley Robinson and Gene Wolfe, so we scarcely need to add further recommendation; to order, see website: [www.cosmos-books.com](http://www.cosmos-books.com); Cosmos Books is a division of Wildside Press, a US print-on-demand publisher.) October 2002.

Pierce, Tamora. **Cold Fire: The Circle Opens, 3.** "Point." Scholastic, ISBN 0-439-98163-8, 358pp, A-format paperback, cover by Les Edwards, £5.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 2002.) 16th August 2002.

Pratchett, Terry. **The Last Hero: A Discworld Fable.** Illustrated by Paul Kidby. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07377-2, 176pp, very large-format paperback, cover by Kidby, £12.99. (Humorous fantasy novella, first published in the UK, 2001; this edition contains 16 additional pages of illustrations; the story features the aged Cohen the Barbarian and his "one final quest" to meet the gods; as Pratchett himself explains it in the accompanying publicity letter, "*The Last Hero* is a 40,000-word, true Discworld novel that fits in with the other 26 books in the sequence. It's just that it has an extra dimension: some parts of it are written in paint!") 22nd August 2002.

Pratchett, Terry. **Night Watch.** "A Discworld novel." Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-60264-2, 364pp, hardcover, cover by Paul Kidby (after Rembrandt), £16.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the 27th "Discworld" novel, and the first in the main series to appear without a Josh Kirby cover [alas], this one concerns Commander Sam Vines of the Ankh-Morpork City Watch and his involvement in a time-travel caper; according to the publishers, Terry Pratchett, O.B.E., Carnegie Medal, worshipped by A. S. Byatt, has now clocked up sales of "22 million copies worldwide" and "his unique brand of humour appeals to middle-aged women and teenage boys alike"; so, if you're a middle-aged bloke or a teenage girl you should steer clear? – well, hardly, for this is seriously good stuff; as Ms Byatt wrote in the *Times*: "Part of Pratchett's genius is in the way he can stand, eternally surprised and benignly amused, outside being human and report

back to us on the almost unimaginable unlikelihood of our existence.") November 2002.

Priest, Christopher. **The Separation.** Scribner, ISBN 0-7432-2033-1, 464pp, C-format paperback, £10.99. (Sf novel, first edition; Priest's first new novel since *The Extremes* [1998], it's another of the complex reality-benders in which he specializes, in this case concerning a split in the timelines that occurs during World War II; alas, there appears to have been no hardcover edition [in fact, it's Priest's first novel, other than some minor pseudonymous stuff, not to appear initially in hard covers] – but that should not be seen as a reflection on its quality; see the interview with the author which appears in this issue of *Interzone*.) 19th August 2002.

Rabe, Jean, and Martin H. Greenberg, eds. **Sol's Children.** DAW, ISBN 0-7564-0082-1, 315pp, A-format paperback, \$6.99. (Sf anthology, first edition; it contains 16 all-original stories about the colonization of the solar system, by Roland Green, Jack C. Haldeman II [recently deceased, alas], John Helfers, Brian A. Hopkins, Mike Resnick, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Michael A. Stackpole, Brian M. Thomsen, Timothy Zahn and others; this is, in effect, the latest issue of the more-or-less monthly DAW/Greenberg "pulp magazine.") August 2002.

Randle, Kevin D. **Operation Roswell.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86710-7, 432pp, hardcover, cover by Bruce Jensen, \$25.95. (Sf novel, first edition; this may well be a debut novel by Randle, "a captain in the U.S. Air Force Reserve and an authority on alien abduction," but in truth, with books like *UFO: Crash at Roswell* and *The Abduction Enigma*, he has been writing this sort of thing for years in the guise of "non-fiction.") 24th September 2002.

Rankin, Robert. **The Hollow Chocolate Bunnies of the Apocalypse.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07313-6, 342pp, hardcover, cover by Seamus Ryan based on models by the author, £9.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; it's set in Toy City, "formerly known as Toy Town," where a serial killer is on the loose; a change of publisher for Rankin: he joins the august Gollancz list with this novel – which is probably his biggest to date – and it's published at a special bargain price.) 5th September 2002.

Rees, Celia. **Blood Sinister.** Scholastic/Point, ISBN 0-439-98231-6, 199pp, B-format paperback, £4.99. (Juvenile horror novel, first published in the UK, 1996; promoted to the more "literary" B format, it's now billed as "a gripping supernatural thriller from acclaimed author Celia Rees.") 20th September 2002.

Reeve, Philip. **Mortal Engines.** Scholastic/Point, ISBN 0-439-97943-9, 293pp, B-format paperback, cover by David Frankland, £5.99. (Juvenile sf/fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 2001; a debut book by a new British writer [born 1966], it begins: "It was a dark, blustery afternoon in spring, and the city of London was chasing a small mining town across the dried-out bed of the old North Sea..."; great stuff!) 20th September 2002.

Resnick, Mike. **The Outpost.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87577-0, 383pp, trade paperback, cover by Ben Warner, \$15.95. (Sf novel, published in the USA, 2001; states the blurb: "on the planet Henry II, orbiting the twin suns of Plantagenet and Tudor,

at the very edge of the great black hole at the center of the Milky Way, there is a tavern called The Outpost.”) 7th August 2002.

Richards, Justin. **Time Zero.** “Doctor Who.” BBC, 0-563-53866-X, 275pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition; featuring the Eighth Doctor with Fitz and Anji.) 2nd September 2002.

Sabin, E. Rose. **A School for Sorcery.** Tor, ISBN 0-765-30289-6, 318pp, hardcover, cover by Vince Natale, \$17.95. (Young-adult fantasy novel, first edition; set in a “School for the Magically Gifted,” this is pretty clearly another attempt to cash in on the Harry Potter boom; it’s a debut novel by a Florida-based writer and former teacher “well known for her award-winning short stories.”) 12th September 2002.

Silverberg, Robert. **The Masks of Time.** “Gollancz SF Collectors’ Editions.” Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07218-0, 252pp, C-format paperback, cover by Jim Burns, £9.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1968; previously published in the UK as *Vornan-19* [Coronet, 1970].) 5th September 2002.

Sladek, John. **Maps: The Uncollected John Sladek.** Edited by David Langford. Big Engine [PO Box 185, Abingdon, Oxon. OX14 1GR], ISBN 1-903468-08-6, xx+359pp, trade paperback, cover by Deirdre Counihan, £9.99. (Sf/satire collection, first edition; a labour of love on Dave Langford’s part, this welcome volume brings together all the remaining uncollected fiction and joky bits and pieces by American writer John Sladek [1937-2000] – little known to the general public but perhaps the greatest satirist of his age; two of the stories here, “Stop Evolution in Its Tracks!” [1988] and “Reinventing the Wheel” [1992], were first published in *Interzone*; recommended; this is the eighth book from the print-on-demand publishing house run by Ben Jeapes; for ordering information, see the website: [www.bigengine.co.uk](http://www.bigengine.co.uk).) August 2002.

Stephenson, Neal, and Frederick George. **Interface.** Arrow, ISBN 0-09-942775-3, 641pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Near-future sf thriller, first published in the USA under the pseudonym “Stephen Bury,” 1994; co-author Frederick George is Neal Stephenson’s uncle; the publishers choose not mention the fact here, but this novel was previously published in the UK, under the Stephen Bury name, by Michael Joseph [1996] and Signet Books [1997].) 12th September 2002.

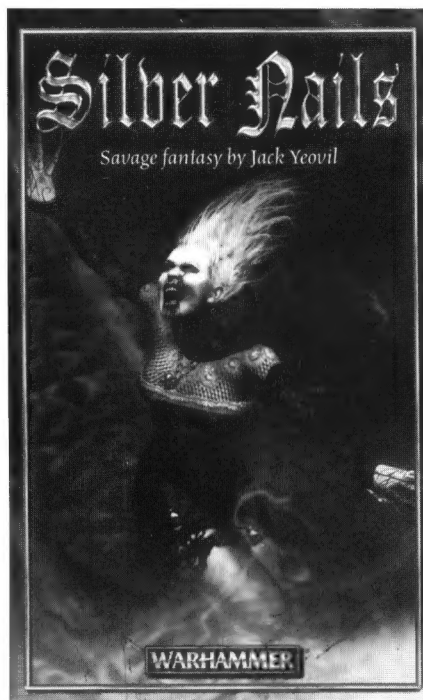
Stover, Matthew. **Traitor.** “Star Wars: The New Jedi Order.” Arrow/Lucas Books, ISBN 0-09-941035-4, xi+292pp, A-format paperback, cover by Cliff Nielsen, £5.99. (Sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 2002; the author’s name is given as Matthew Woodring Stover on the cover, but not on the title page.) 29th August 2002.

Thomsen, Brian M., ed. **The American Fantasy Tradition.** Tor, ISBN 0-765-30152-0, 604pp, hardcover, \$27.95. (Fantasy anthology, first edition; proof copy received; this big book looks to be interesting, even if many of the stories – from “Rip Van Winkle” to “Hatrack River” – are familiar; it endeavours “to delineate the true American tradition of fantasy from the Anglo-European canon”; to that end, it reprints stories by Louisa May Alcott, L. Frank Baum,

Steven Vincent Benét, Ambrose Bierce, Robert W. Chambers, Kate Chopin, Avram Davidson, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Joel Chandler Harris, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Washington Irving, Shirley Jackson, Henry James, H. P. Lovecraft, Frank Stockton, Mark Twain, Edith Wharton and others, alongside work by still-living writers such as Greg Bear, Michael Bishop, Ray Bradbury, Orson Scott Card, Bradley Denton, Harlan Ellison, Stephen King, W. P. Kinsella, Ursula Le Guin, Richard Matheson, Gene Wolfe and several others; it’s co-copyrighted “Tekno Books,” which means it’s a Martin H. Greenberg production.) October 2002.

Thorpe, Gav. **The Claws of Chaos: Slaves to Darkness, Book One.** “A Warhammer Novel.” Games Workshop/Black Library [Willow Rd., Lenton, Nottingham NG7 2WS], ISBN 1-84154-257-1, 280pp, A-format paperback, cover by Adrian Smith, £5.99. (Fantasy role-playing game spinoff novel, first edition; although we haven’t listed any before, this appears to be the third novel by newish writer Gav Thorpe, his previous two having been contributions to the related “Warhammer 40,000” series.) August 2002.

Tolkien, Christopher. **The History of Middle-earth Index.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-713743-5, xxiii+484pp, B-format paperback, cover by John Howe, £9.99. (Index to the 12 volumes of J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The History of Middle-earth*, first edition; this is a recondite item indeed: “In one of the largest works of ‘literary archaeology’ ever undertaken, Tolkien’s son and literary executor edited the vast collection of manuscripts... and these were posthumously published... Christopher Tolkien also compiled a very detailed and thorough index for each of these books. This companion... now brings together all of the indexes in one place...”; the dozen indexes referred to have been compiled into one alphabetical sequence, which was surely a huge task in itself; the reverse of the title page carries the note: “Compiled by Helen Armstrong.”) 5th August 2002.



Topping, Keith. **Ghost Ship.** Introduction by Hugh Lamb. Frontispiece by Dariusz Jaszcak. “Doctor Who Novellas.” Telos Publishing [61 Elgar Ave., Tolworth, Surrey KT5 9JP], 1-903889-09-X, 107pp, hardcover, £25. (Sf TV-series spinoff novella, first edition; there is a simultaneous standard edition [hardcover] priced at £10 [not seen]; the limited “deluxe edition” which the publishers have sent as a review copy is signed by author, illustrator and introducer; set aboard the liner the *Queen Mary* during a voyage in 1963 [the year of the author’s birth, and of the Doctor’s TV debut], this is the fourth in a series of nicely-produced “Doctor Who” novellas from David J. Howe and Stephen James Walker’s Telos imprint; for ordering information see their website: [www.telos.co.uk](http://www.telos.co.uk).) 22nd August 2002.

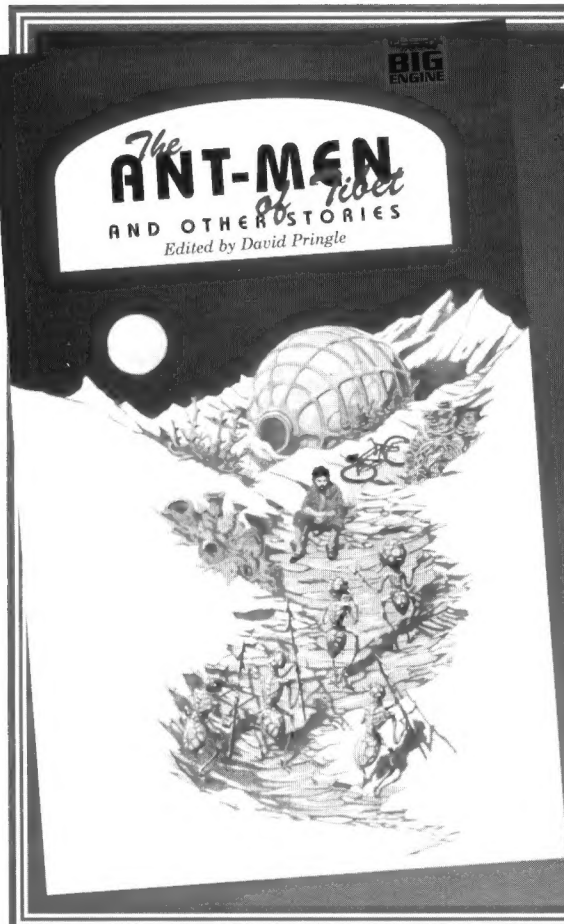
Vinge, Vernor. **The Collected Stories of Vernor Vinge.** Tor/Orb, ISBN 0-312-87584-3, 464pp, trade paperback, \$15.95. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 2001; it contains 17 stories, mostly reprinted from magazines of the 1960s to the 1980s – but the last item, “Fast Times at Fairmont High,” is a previously-unpublished, newly-written novella.) 8th August 2002.

Wilkins, Kim. **Fallen Angel.** Gollancz, ISBN 1-85798-333-5, 552pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Historical horror novel, first published in Australia as *Angel of Ruin*, 2001; a fourth novel by “Australia’s queen of the supernatural,” set in London [the author’s birthplace] and involving slippage back to the 17th century, complete with Great Plague, Great Fire and the wayward daughters of poet John Milton.) 29th August 2002.

Yeovil, Jack. **Silver Nails.** “A Warhammer Novel.” Games Workshop/Black Library, ISBN 1-84154-258-X, 282pp, A-format paperback, cover by Clint Langley, £5.99. (Fantasy role-playing game spinoff collection, first edition; “Jack Yeovil” is a pseudonym of Kim Newman, as is announced on the title page and back cover; despite the use of the word “novel” in the packaging, this consists of five distinct stories; three of them – “Red Thirst,” “No Gold in the Grey Mountains” and “The Ignorant Armies” – are reprinted from earlier [now defunct] Games Workshop “Warhammer” anthologies; however, the remaining two, novella-length and constituting slightly over half the book – “The Warhawk” and “The Ibbly Fish Factor” – are published for the first time here; more witty, inventive, stylish stuff, and a must for all Kim Newman fans.) September 2002.

Zahn, Timothy. **Manta’s Gift.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87829-X, 427pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; traditional stuff, it’s described as “a brilliant new epic sf adventure.”) September 2002.

Zindell, David. **The Lightstone: Book One of the Ea Cycle. Part One: The Ninth Kingdom.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648620-7, 672pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 2001; the author’s first foray into Big Commercial Fantasy – and very big it is too – this novel was originally published as a single fat volume, but evidently HarperCollins are splitting it in two for the mass-market paperback reprint; “Part Two: The Silver Sword” will follow; the full thing was reviewed by Nick Gevers in *Interzone* 171.) 2nd September 2002.



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